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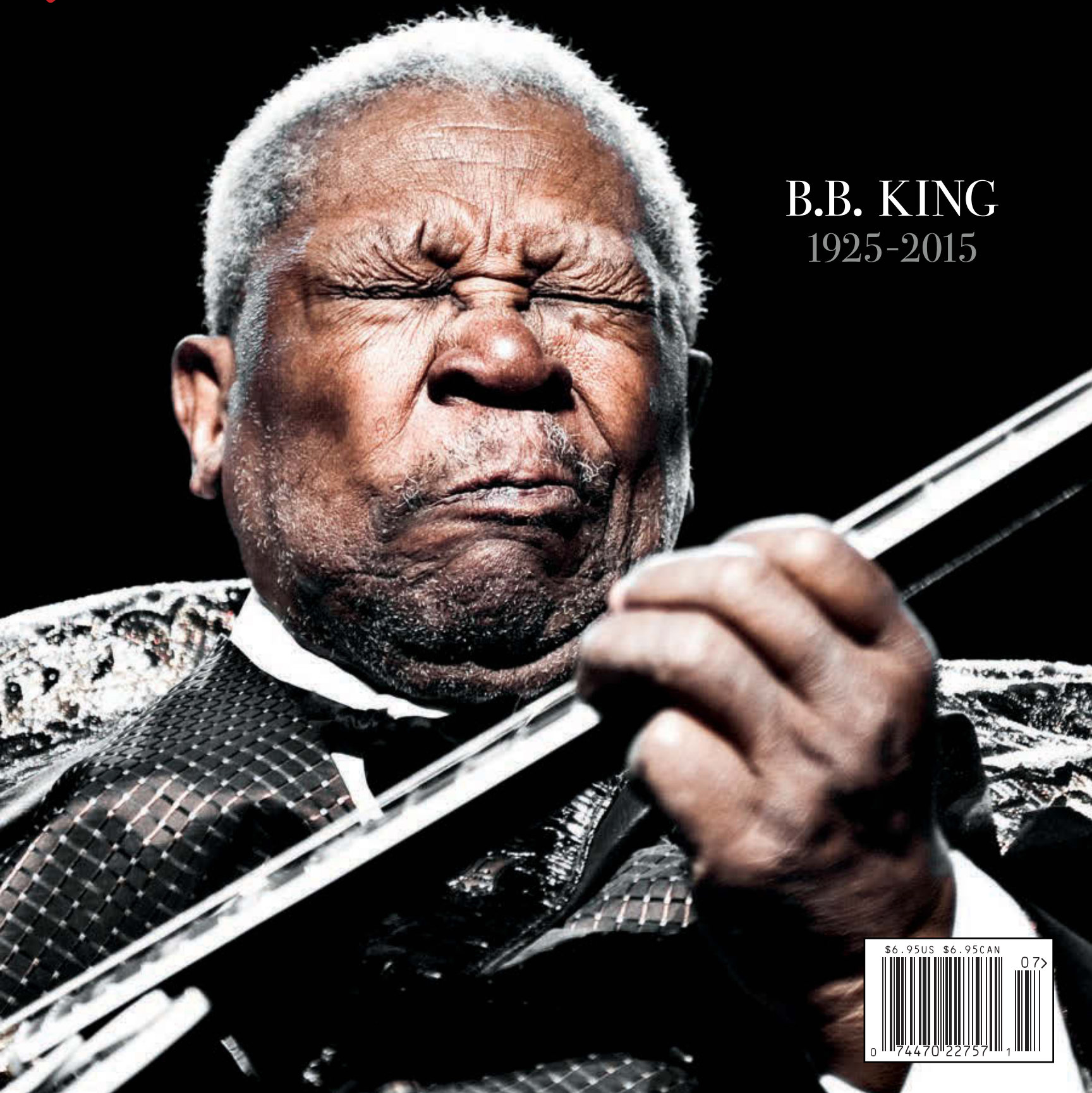

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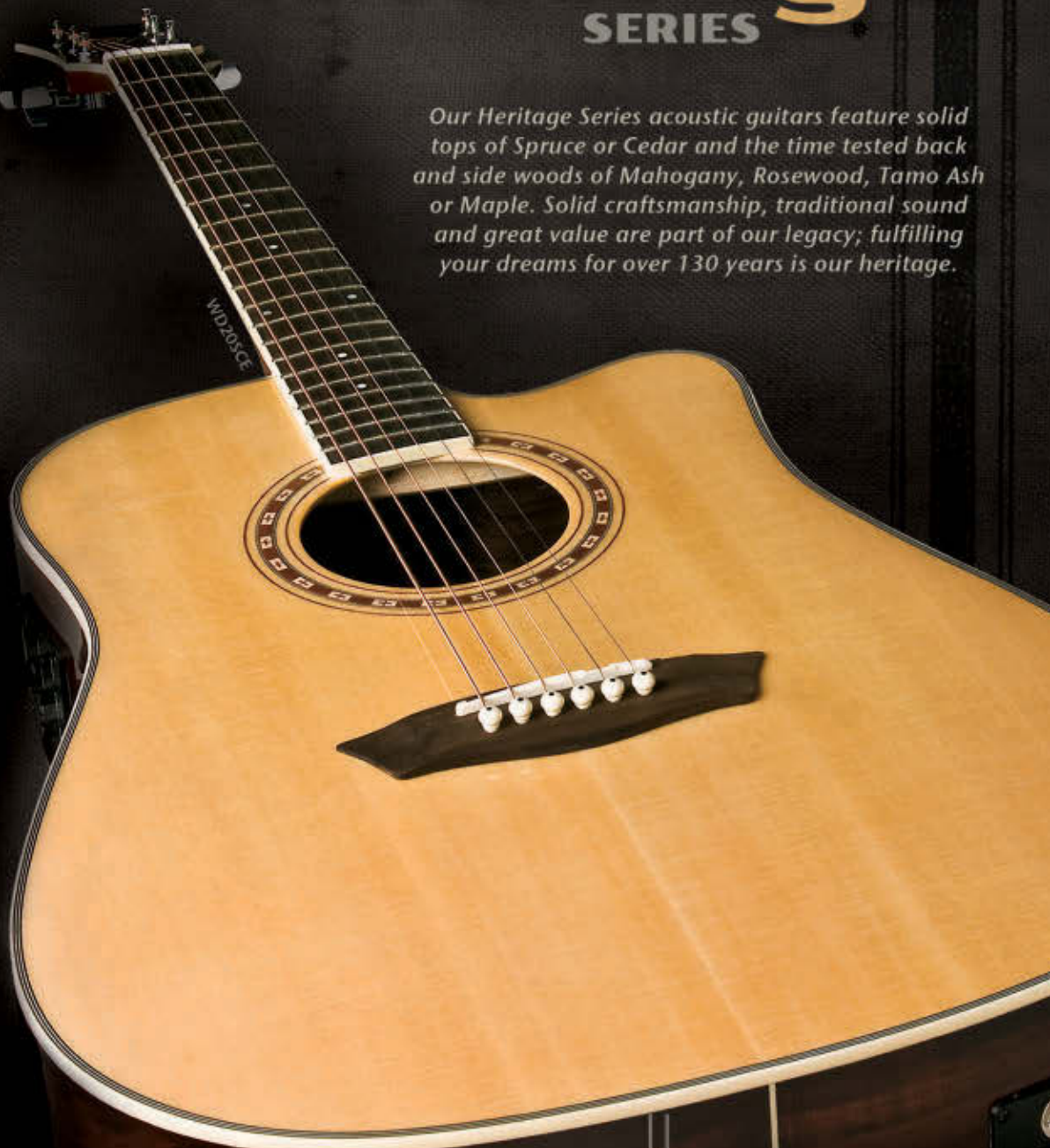

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Premier Guitar [ISSN 1945-077X (print) ISSN 1945-0788 (online)] is published monthly. **SUBSCRIPTION RATES:** $24.95 (12 issues), $39.95 (24 issues) Call for Canada, Mexico and foreign subscription rates 877-704-4327; Copyright ©2015. All Rights Reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is prohibited. Premier Guitar is a publication of Gearhead Communications, L.L.C. **CUSTOMER SERVICE:** lois@premierguitar.com.

PREMIER GUITAR (USPS 025-017)
Volume 20, Issue 7
Published monthly by:
Gearhead Communications, LLC
Three Research Center
Marion, IA 52302
Phone number: 877-704-4327 • Fax: 319-447-5599

Periodical Postage Rate paid at Marion, IA 52302 and at Additional Mailing Offices

POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to: Gearhead Communications, LLC, Three Research Center, Marion, IA 52302

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info@premierguitar.com

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PORTRAITS IN TONE

Richie Kotzen RK5

For the bulk of his 2014 tour with the Winery Dogs and his recent solo tour, Richie Kotzen was spotted using a mysterious red pedal by Tech 21. Countless photos and questions were posted on the internet by fans craving to know more. A gifted player known for his unique style, Richie is also highly respected for his tone, so who could blame them?

Not just another version of the Fly Rig 5® simply bearing his name, the Richie Kotzen RK5 Signature Fly Rig was a close, year-long collaborative effort. Meticulous about every facet of his playing, singing, songwriting and tone, Richie's attention to the details of this pedal was nothing less. What distinguishes the RK5 from the Fly Rig 5 is Richie's Signature OMG overdrive. Tuned specifically to Richie's ear, the OMG section brings in the organic Class A-style distortion, but with a tighter, snappier response. It is designed to articulate every nuance of Richie's dizzying playing style for all modes and moods, from clean to aggressive and from rhythmic chords to infinite sustain when it's solo time.

The RK5 offers the same other essential features as the Fly Rig 5: the all-analog SansAmp™, reverb, delay with tap tempo, and a powerful boost. For fly gigs across the globe, jamming at the local hang, and running off to last minute sessions, just pop your RK5 into your guitar case and head for the door.

photo by greg vorobiov

Actual size: 11.5"l x 2.5"w x 1.25"h • Weight: 18.6 oz.

The Richie Kotzen OMG Signature Overdrive is also available as a stand-alone pedal.

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The Infantilization of Guitar (or "Hulk Fight Robot. Hulk RAD!")

BY SHAWN HAMMOND

@PG_shawnh

Today I got me panties in a twist from what *should* have been a pretty innocuous source—an article heralding a band's debut album. The band name doesn't matter. What riled me was a quote from the guitarist.

"You can't run from your influences."

I'll admit that the cookie-cutter badassery of the dudes pictured above the text is probably what pushed me over the edge. My gag reflex is strong when it comes to guys in leather vests, copious amounts of scarves, and/or unbuttoned shirts making duck faces to a camera as they strut around in high-heeled boots, sunglasses, and boutique jeans that cost as much as half my wardrobe.

So maybe I overreacted. Maybe I don't know his intentions or the full context. But after heading online to listen to the band's 70/30 blend of cock rock and Nashville boardroom ballads, the guitarist's pontificating just seemed like coy justification for the MO that it's perfectly fine to rip off your heroes.

Strangely, I thought of the recent rant from British actor Simon Pegg, star of *Shaun of the Dead* and recent installments of *Mission Impossible* and *Star Trek.* He told *Radio Times:*

> "[P]art of me looks at society … and just thinks we've been infantilized by our own taste. Now we're essentially all consuming very childish things … Films used to be about challenging, emotional journeys or moral questions that might make you walk away and re-evaluate how you felt about ... whatever. Now we're walking out of the cinema really not thinking about anything, other than the fact that the Hulk just had a fight with a robot."

Critics thought it rich that such a critique came from Pegg, whose autobiography is titled *Nerd Do Well.*

Wait, weren't we talking about music? I know, I know—hear me out: Pegg—whose work with director/co-writer Edgar Wright and actor Nick Frost is exceptionally witty and surprisingly nuanced—was pointing out that comic books, science fiction, and other heady fringe interests that used to get kids beat up or mocked in the '80s are now mostly bullshit dumbed down for bigger audiences and wider paraphernalia distribution.

Music's no different. Stuff that used to be edgy—and not just swaggering rock 'n' roll—is now shooting off the end of virtual conveyor belts and burying us in a pile of throwaway MP3s. Sure, there's always been and always will be crap movies, music, etc., but it's hard to argue that 21st-century digital living hasn't fractured our attention, affected our capacity for depth, and increased our appetite for fleeting fluff.

And that makes it tough, because as musicians we're influenced by everything we hear. And the adventurous aren't just influenced by music, but by any auditory sensation. If you like a song, riff, or, say, the sound of water on the brink of boiling, it's going to wedge into your brain and become part of the mysterious mélange that affects your playing, writing, and recording. If you hate it, it'll also affect musical decisions.

But while you can't detach your brain from the sonic snapshots in your labyrinthine cranial scrapbook, you can vigilantly watch out for instances when you sound way too much like your favorites and take corrective action. And here's a thought: If it's literally impossible to escape your influences, doesn't that fact alone make an effing good case for trying extra hard to be less obvious about it? Isn't that more in the spirit of the greatest musicians? Pick any world-changing artist, and you can hear plain as day that they changed the world by not being what was already here. That doesn't mean they despised the music around them. But they wouldn't settle and they filtered influences in a new way.

So yeah, you'll never fully escape your influences—and who'd want to?—but at least cutting the umbilical and consciously trying to be your own person will result in a less obvious sampling from your brain stew. Otherwise, wittingly or unwittingly, you're just cranking out stuff for that conveyor belt.

Shawn Hammond
Chief Content Officer
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FEEDBACK LOOP

Cat Problems

Hey Shawn!
Hope you're well. I was inspired to doodle "ToxoShatmosis" after reading your article ["Tuning Up: Shatner, Cat Parasites, and the Quest for Mastery," May 2015] this morning. Tuning Up is always fun to read.

—John Achenbach, illustrator for *The Simpsons*

The Big Picture

As much as I'm not a huge fan of the Fractal revolution that seems to be permeating through Rig Rundowns recently, you have to look at it through the eye of a touring musician. Kevin [Wasserman] even says in this interview ["Rig Rundown: The Offspring's Kevin 'Noodles' Wasserman"] that the consistency night-to-night using an Axe-Fx is a huge influence for why somebody may switch from tube amps to digital. Yeah, it's not the same and he says here he prefers tube amps for recording, but for traveling the country/world, it's nice to know you'll get the same sound each night. It's practical and one less thing to worry about on the road when a busted tube amp could create all kinds of issues.

—tee5152, via YouTube

Remembering Renbourn

Used to see (and rather worship) John at the Black Dog in Havant [England] in the late '60s/early '70s. Imagine my surprise when I asked a hirsute gentleman sitting at the table at the 1994 Edmonton Folk Festival after-party his name, to find I was sitting with the man himself. A lovely guy, courteous and forthcoming. He will be missed.

—Paul Stacey, via premierguitar.com

Break It to Make It

Well, I can give up trying to get Adam's [Franklin] oscillating sound, unless I pick up an old Boss DF-2 Super Feedbacker/Distortion and promptly break it! Very cool story ["Swervedriver: Shoegazers Ride Again," May 2015]—and great interview. The new album is great.

—Jim Ciccone, via premierguitar.com

State of the Stomp

I have to admit, I want to read at least 100x more articles by Philippe Herndon ["State of the Stomp: More Sounds from Fewer Pedals," April 2015]. Please keep them coming. Smart and witty.

—Alessandro Longoni, via premierguitar.com

That was an excellent article, and well written. Sometimes less is definitely more. I've never used more than two OD/fuzz pedals, and usually there's only one on my board. Every pedal between your guitar and the front of your amp is going to subtract at least some amount of signal strength, and too many pedals can thin out your tone in a very noticeable and undesirable way even if you have high-end pedals, quality patch cables, and a proper power supply.

—Victor Eremita, via premierguitar.com

To paraphrase a story Jimmy Vivino told about playing a gig with Joe Walsh: "Joe asked to play my Les Paul. I said sure. First thing he does is pull the cord from my massive pedalboard and go direct into the amp. He starts twiddling the guitar's tone and volume knobs and the next thing I hear is the tone I'd been seeking for years!"

—Cliff Stepp, via premierguitar.com

We Stand Corrected

Hi Guys/Gals,
I'm writing to point out that on page 28 in the June 2015 issue there is an incorrect description of Craig Bartok's '70s 1955 Reissue Les Paul.

Gibson first reissued the 1954 Black Beauty in 1972, 1973, 1975 and 1977. There was never a 1955 Reissue. Sixty were built in '72; 1,090 were built in '73; three in '75, and one in '77. Reference: *The Modern Era of the Les Paul Legacy 1968-2009*
Take care,**—David C. Stewart**

Keep those comments coming!

Please send your suggestions, gripes, comments, and good words directly to **info@premierguitar.com**.

Socialize with Us!

@premierguitar
@John_Fogerty
The Foges is so gnarly, he is one of the last American legends, a gunslinger.
—@SuperKingNVT

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@JohnBohlinger
Great slide lesson. John's explanation really opened up the fretboard for me.
—@williamfortney

Hobbes liked to play his Strat Jimi style. He was my big tiger boy. RIP.
—Michael Pankow

I loved this article ["Digging Deeper: Pentatonic Chords," April 2014]. I got sick of pentatonic and blues scales because of all of the players that don't stay creative when using the scales but this helped me realize that it was the players that I was sick of, not what was being played. Thanks Premier Guitar.
—John Cameron

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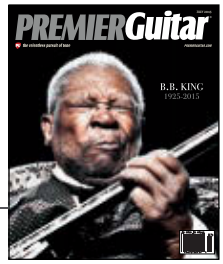
On the Cover:
B.B. King plays the blues.
Photo by Jerome Brunet



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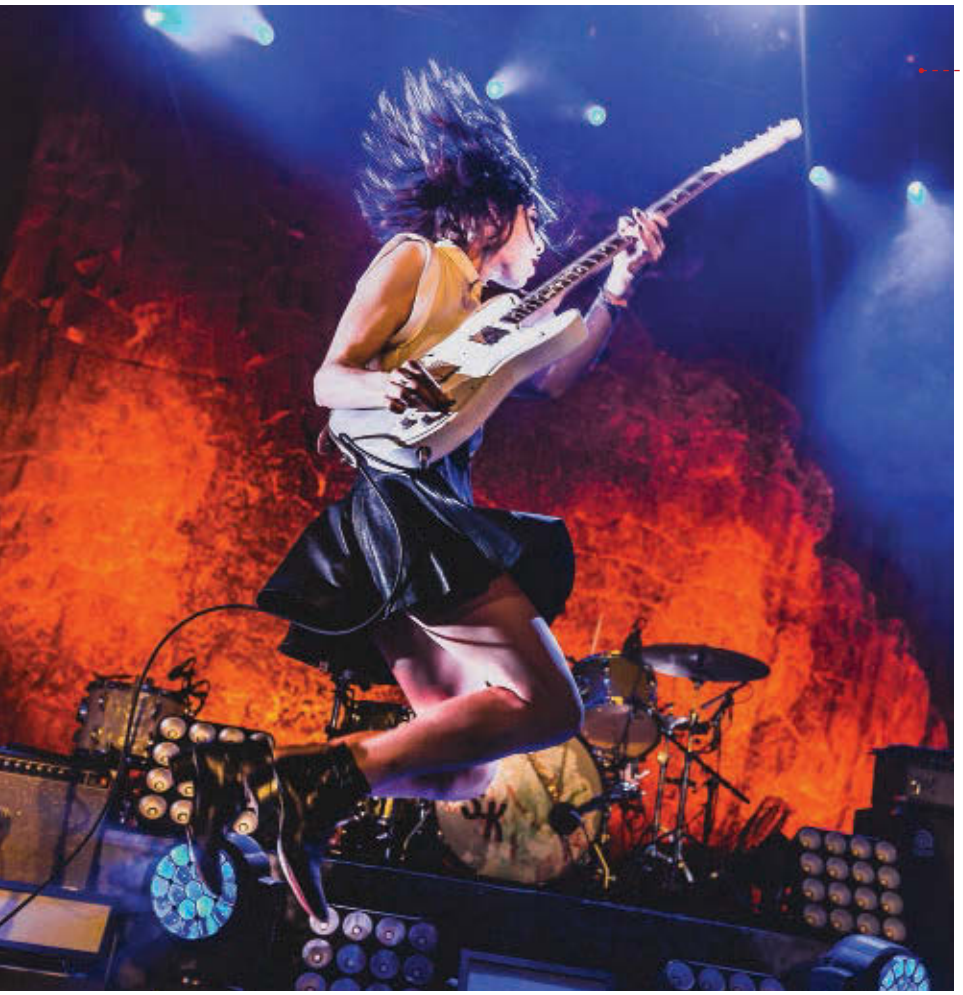

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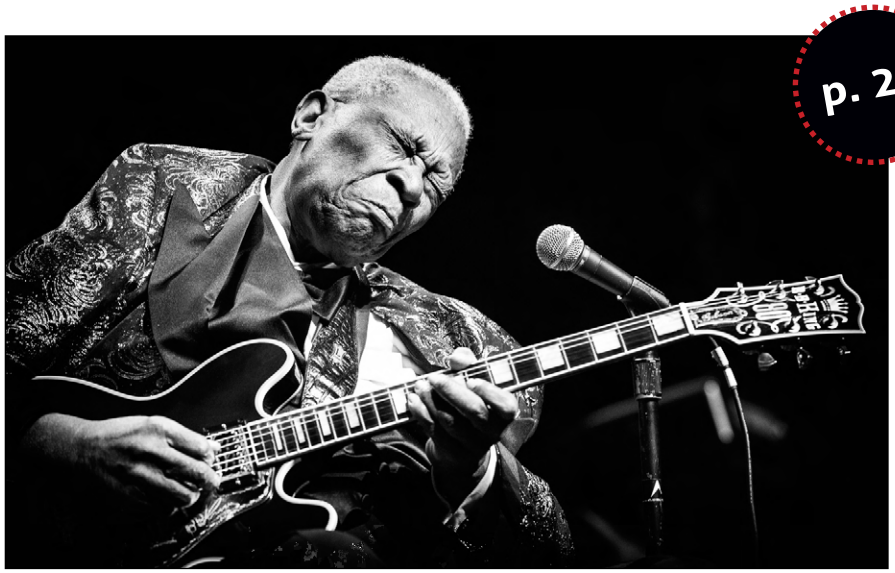

p. 28

"I remember Jimi Hendrix tape-recording what we were doing that night ... And he died before I got my tape. So I keep saying now, when I die, now if I can find him, he's going to give me my tape!"
—B.B. King, p. 28

Bottom left: Photo by Jerome Brunet **Above left:** Photo by Debi Del Grande

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FEATURED

Psyching Out!

The guitar in this photo has seconds to live! Psych! As you can see here, **A Place to Bury Strangers** guitarist/frontman **Oliver Ackermann** threw his Jaguar around something fierce at the 2015 **Austin Psych Fest** (May 8-10). One of our writers on the scene, **Alex Maiolo**, called APTBS the best live act of the weekend. If you want to learn about our other favorite performers and the gear they use to make mind-altering rock riffage, check out our coverage of the **Black Angels**, **White Fence**, **Nothing**, and **Thee Oh Sees**, as well as a rundown of reunited groups, like **13th Floor Elevators**, who took the stage for the first time in *50 years*!

Read this online and more at premierguitar.com/jul2015

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by Nili Brosh

BEYOND BLUES
Eric Johnson vs. Joe Bonamassa
by Levi Clay

Giddy Up, Gear Roundup Videos

This year we've put our gear coverage on steroids, aiming to bring you the lowdown on different options within a specific gear category. Recently we've done roundups on **overdrive pedals**, **1x12 bass combos**, and **small-body acoustics**. As an added bonus, we'd like to remind you that there are video demos for each piece of gear in these rundowns. That's 13 more videos to watch, so get going on that.

Double Bonus: Feel free to leave your *own* reviews online. That's right, we've added a feature on our website that allows readers to weigh in by rating the gear they've tried. Drop a note to info@premierguitar.com and let us know what you think.

Watch these gear demos now at premierguitar.com/reviews

Above Left: Susie Denegree

GUITARDOM'S TOP TWEETS

Landau's new board... Sportin' a Blue Hippo MkII and Green Rhino MkII

—@jtripps

Told B.B. King you could recognize his sound anywhere. His answer: "Really? Alright. I never argue with a man that's giving me a compliment."

—@PatrickDoyleRS

Bruce Springsteen just butt-dialed me.

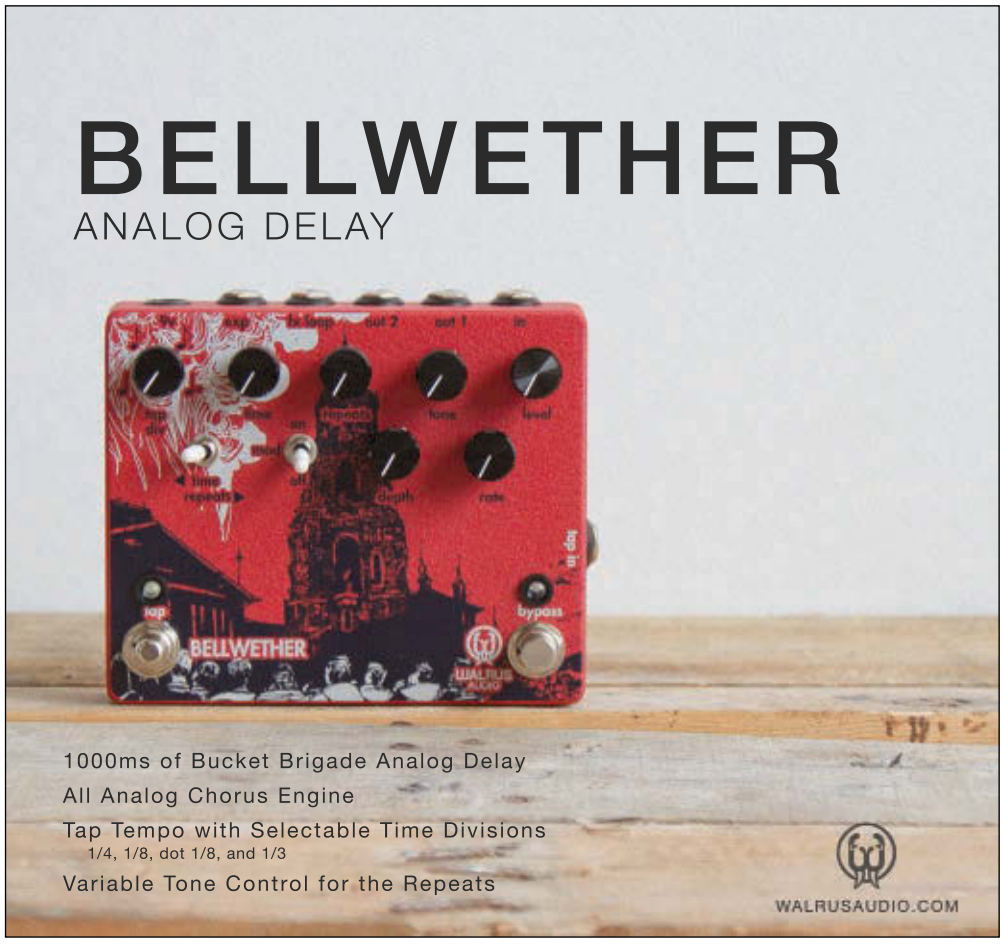
—@JoeWalsh

Harvard keg party. Spandex. Gibson Explorer. Poli-sci major. #tbt #getonmylevel

—@tmorello

I just listened to a solo I tracked yesterday & got goosebumps. that only means I really dig the player I was in the moment I recorded it.

—@TheRealPhilX



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The company's latest rock box is a 6V6-powered machine equipped with a custom-designed Eminence 50-watt 12" speaker, and it comes loaded with onboard tube-driven reverb and tremolo.

$2,399 MSRP

drzamps.com

3
EARTHQUAKER DEVICES
Levitation Reverb

EQD's latest handbuilt reverb uses four controls—atmosphere, decay, mix, and tone—and a short/long length switch to conjure tones somewhere between dirty '60s chambers and classic spring and plate reverb stylings.

$185 Street

earthquakerdevices.com

4
BENSON AMPS
Monarch Combo

Available in a variety of configurations, the newest version is a 15-watt combo that tackles both British- and American-flavored tones via either 6V6 or EL84 power tubes.

Starts at $1,599 Street

bensonamps.com

5
AMZEL ELECTRONICS
Cheshire Cat

The reboxed and revamped Cat employs a 35 percent smaller enclosure, its freq and res knobs now control the tone-evaporator filter that changes the distortion, and the accent dial controls dynamic range.

$299 MSRP

amzelelectronics.com

6
AGUILAR
AG 5M/J-HC

These humbuckers are wired in parallel to recreate the classic Stingray tone—crisp treble, articulate midrange, and thunderous lows. They feature 42-gauge Formvar wire and alnico 5 magnets.

$224 (pair) Street

aguilaramp.com

7
WARWICK
Adam Clayton Signature Bass

The U2 bassist's latest namesake model is based on Warwick's Streamer CV and includes a brass nut and bridge, a passive Seymour Duncan Quarter Pound pickup, and passive MEC electronics.

$8,399 MSRP

warwick.de

8
CARL MARTIN
Octa-Swtich MK3

The latest pedal switcher from the Danish company takes a smaller form factor and packs in eight effects loops, two external switching jacks, and a switchable buffer.

$427 Street

carlmartin.com

9
DIMARZIO
Black Angel

This passive magnetic soundhole pickup for acoustics is a responsive and quiet unit that features a humbucking magnetic circuit that is acoustically isolated to prevent unwanted finger and pick noise.

$229 MSRP

dimarzio.com

10
RECORDING KING
Dirty 30's Harmonella Single 0

Based on the old, dry, throaty-sounding department-store guitars favored by bluesman, the Harmonella Single 0 features a spruce top with x-bracing, white wood back and sides, nato neck, and rosewood fretboard.

$199 Street

recordingking.com

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READER GUITAR OF THE MONTH

Name: Adam Kilchenman
Location: Louisville, Kentucky
Guitar: Fender American '72 Telecaster Custom (Vintage Reissue)

According to Adam, everything on this rare "sienna burst" Tele is stock, except for the bridge saddles, which were replaced with a solid-brass compensated set. It has a uniquely figured swamp-ash body, rosewood fretboard, and flamed-maple neck. The neck pickup is a Fender Wide Range humbucker.

"I'd been looking at this guitar for over a year and a half at my local store, but never had the extra money to pick it up," he shares. "I must have pulled it off the wall a dozen times, wishing it was mine. I have worked in the music industry selling guitars, and it's obviously a passion of mine, so I know quite a bit about guitars. I could honestly say that no matter how much I researched, I'd not seen another one with these exact features, and definitely not one so strikingly beautiful.

"Luckily for me, the store went out of business in March 2015. I told my wife that the store had it at a closeout price the last month they were open. She knew how much I really wanted it. What I didn't know is that she'd saved enough money to get it. She said, 'Go get it. Make it yours.' I was shocked. I couldn't get to the store fast enough. I'm quite a lucky man: I have a gorgeous guitar and a wonderful wife who's even more so."

OPENING NOTES

Mike Kerr

March 31, 2015
Sala Apolo
Barcelona, Spain
Photo by Rosario Lopez

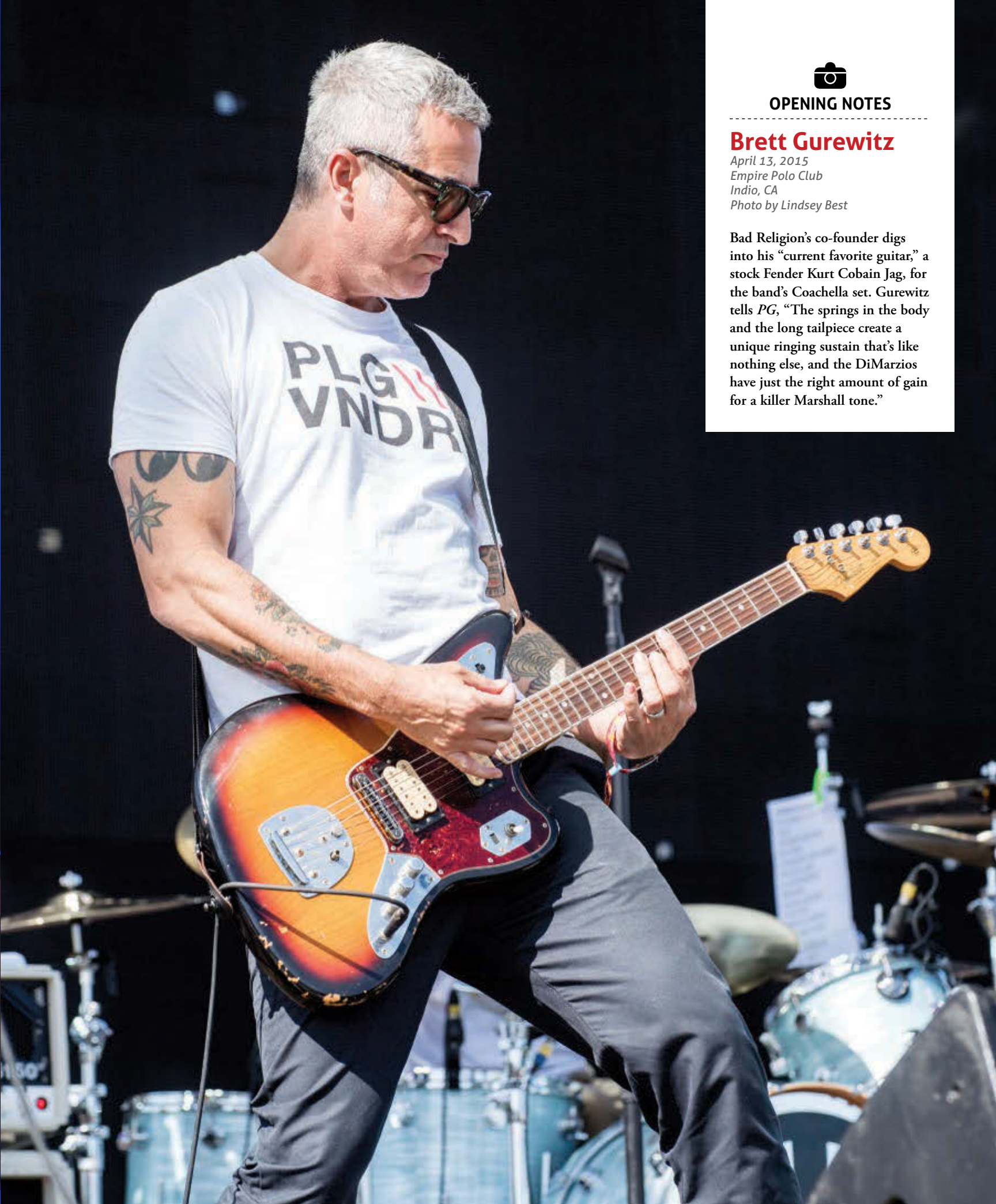
The stringed half of power duo Royal Blood thumps his Gretsch G2220, one of his seven stock Electromatic Junior Jet II road basses. "It was the first bass I had," Kerr tells *PG*. "It's easy to play and I'm very comfortable with it."

OPENING NOTES

Carrie Brownstein

April 30, 2015
Hollywood Palladium
Hollywood, CA
Photo by Debi Del Grande

The Sleater-Kinney co-frontwoman takes flight in Hollywood with one of her primary axes, a custom semi-hollow T-style built by Reuben Cox that's packed with a pair of Lollar Regal Wide Range-inspired humbuckers.



OPENING NOTES

Brett Gurewitz

April 13, 2015
Empire Polo Club
Indio, CA
Photo by Lindsey Best

Bad Religion's co-founder digs into his "current favorite guitar," a stock Fender Kurt Cobain Jag, for the band's Coachella set. Gurewitz tells *PG*, "The springs in the body and the long tailpiece create a unique ringing sustain that's like nothing else, and the DiMarzios have just the right amount of gain for a killer Marshall tone."

OPENING NOTES

Hozier

April 24, 2015
Fair Grounds Race Course
New Orleans, LA
Photo by Barry Brecheisen

The soulful singer-songwriter takes on the New Orleans Jazz Festival with his No. 1: a 1965 Harmony H76 that's all original except for the replaced bridge. Hozier first came across his H76 as a loaner while waiting on a repair but "fell in love with the sound and feel of it."

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B.B. KING

BY ANDY ELLIS

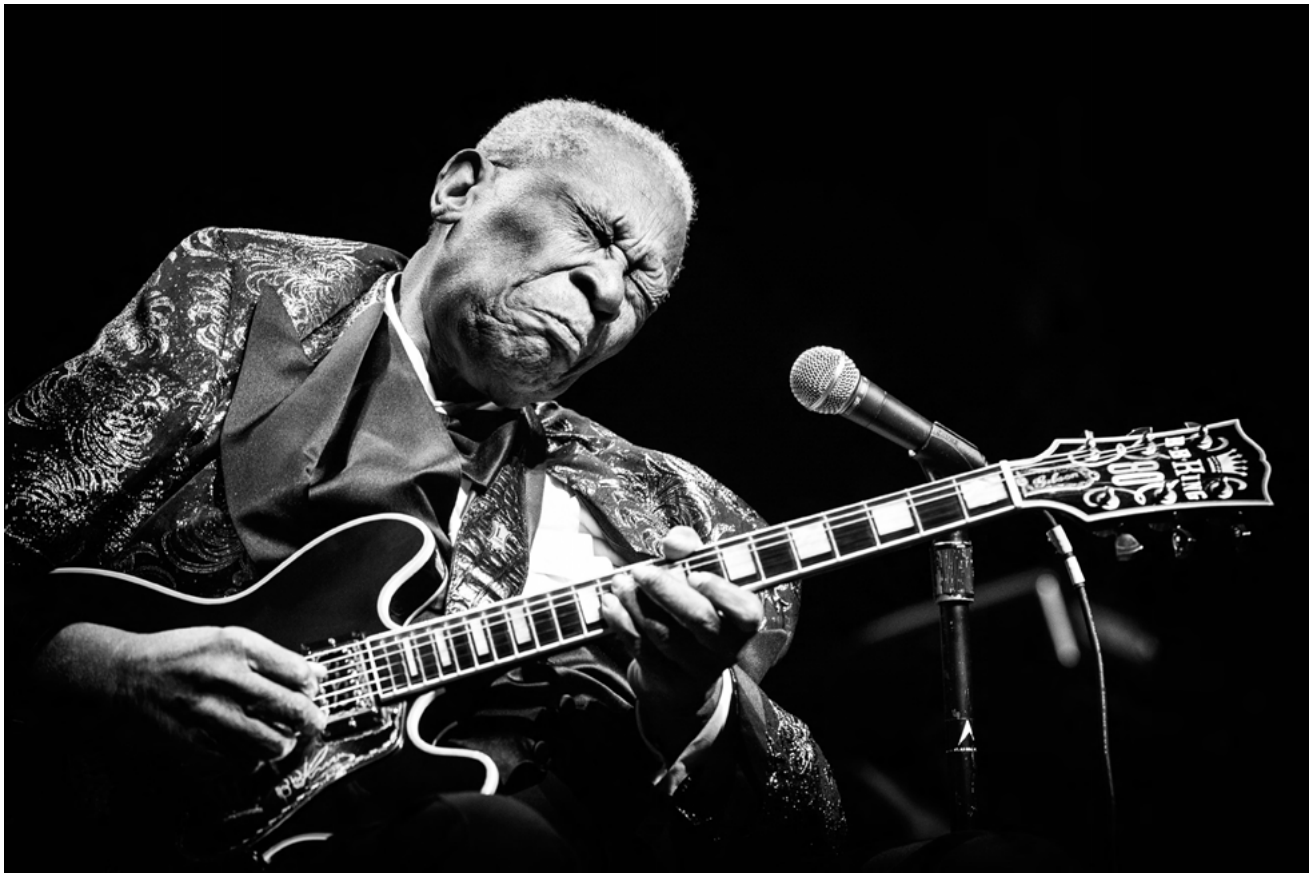

Photo by Jerome Brunet

Guitarists and blues fans around the world are mourning the loss of B.B. King, who died May 15, 2015, in Las Vegas. Two weeks prior, he was admitted to home hospice after suffering from dehydration and complications brought on by type 2 diabetes. After a valiant struggle, King succumbed to the disease at age 89.

Perhaps millions of words have been written about Riley B. King—the "Beale Street Blues Boy"—and his amazing journey that began in 1925 on a cotton plantation in Mississippi. His early career in Memphis and rise to worldwide fame as "King of the Blues" is lovingly documented in the book he cowrote with historian Dick Waterman, *The B.B. King Treasures*. In this extraordinary memoir, photos, posters, and memorabilia from King's personal archives illustrate a life well lived by a boy who fell in love with the guitar and followed his dreams to become the world's greatest blues ambassador. If you're interested in exploring the details of his life, track down this beautiful volume and read it while listening to *Live at the Regal*—the 1964 album that inspired so many rock guitarists who came up in the '60s.

I was one of those guitarists. While in high school circa 1967, I discovered B.B. King by way of two of my heroes, Michael Bloomfield and Eric Clapton. They, like many other great emerging guitarists of the day, never missed an opportunity to give King credit for showing us all how to bend strings, add sweet vibrato to a keening note, and how to slice through an ensemble with a fat, yet cutting humbucker

Visit premierguitar.com to hear Andy's interview with Mr. King.

tone. When I first saw King and his horn band in Boston in 1970, I was astounded by his powerful sound—not loud, but *penetrating*—and the joyous swing that permeated every phrase he played.

In June 2000, I found myself sitting across a table from King at his New York City nightclub. I was interviewing him on the morning the doors would open for the first time. King was a large man, and he took up most of the red vinyl booth facing my microphone and recorder. But even larger was his presence. Relaxed and jovial, he exuded charm. But here also was a man who'd faced intense racial discrimination in the early days (imagine being required to enter a club you're headlining through its back door). This was a man who'd fought his way into the music business and triumphed, against all odds. In his aura I felt an undeniable sense of purpose and steely resolve. This man wouldn't tolerate fools. He was, after all, the King.

The focus of our conversation was the then-new recording of *Riding with the King*, his Grammy-winning collaboration with Clapton. But in addition to specifics about this fiery album, King shared powerful insights about his music, the blues, and other guitarists.

"I feel that I'm quite limited," he told me as he gazed across his sparkling new club, with carpenters, television camera crews, bartenders, and wait staff scurrying around to get ready for the grand opening that was only hours away. "But I tease Eric. I told him he's like my lady—he can get me to do things I'd never do. Like doing acoustic things? Ain't no way I would have pulled it out. But he suggested it, and I tried it, and it worked out all right."

King didn't like to boast about his guitar playing. "I never practice as much as I should. And it's laziness on my part, so I'm nothing like as good as I should be. While it always sounds good to me, it seems to me that I'm pleasing myself, not other people. And I want *everybody* to be able to get something good out of what I do. But then I'm lazy, and I find myself getting angry with me about that. But I know whose fault it is—mine."

He went on to recount a story from the '60s that occurred at the historic Cafe au Go Go in New York. "One night during this time, we had a jam. Al Kooper from Blood, Sweat & Tears, he was with us. Jimi Hendrix was with us. I remember Jimi Hendrix tape-recording what we were doing that night. And he was supposed to give us a tape. And he died before I got my tape. So I keep saying now, when I die, now if I can *find* him, he's going to give me my tape! Because that was a memorable occasion."

The conversation shifted to another deceased guitarist, Stevie Ray Vaughan. "He was like a son. I've got four sons—and I love them all—but it seems like he was the fifth one. That's the way it was with Stevie. Stevie had a way of respecting me, and when he smiled, it would just go *through* me. He was a beautiful young man. God, I miss him."

When I asked King to describe what he listens for in other guitarists, he didn't mince words. "I like for them to put *themselves* into what they're doing. Not just play. Not just be technical. I'm not so much so, but a lot of people are so technical that everything they play is so right there, so to the *point*. That's good. It shows that you practice. But when a guy lives what he's doing, you can feel it.

"I guess if I could play fast I wouldn't want to be as fast as a lot of the people are. If you notice, my talk is slow. That's the way I feel when I'm playing. I want to make sure you understand every word. Trying to get my point over. Stammers and stutters, I do a lot of that. I think that's even in my playing. So I sometimes have to go back and get that note again and try to make sure that it's clear and to the point *this* time. So you get me. You understand? That's the way I hear myself playing."

And King's heroes? "Some of the people that I listened to in the early years, T-Bone Walker, Elmore James, Lonnie Johnson, Blind Lemon [Jefferson] ... and you *gotta* remember Django and Charlie Christian. They were jazz guitarists, and I loved them. But Lonnie Johnson was at the top of the heap for me.

"Another idol I never talked a lot about—this might be the first time I ever mentioned it—Louis Armstrong. Louis had the gravel voice, but he was so much better than I'll ever be because he knew all the standard tunes. He was a great jazz musician, but he played blues like nobody else. I *felt* what he was doing. I believe you are the first person I've ever mentioned that to."

Even as King's manager and publicist began hovering around the table—our time would soon be up—he had words of wisdom to share with fellow guitarists and he wasn't going to be rushed. "I thought that everybody seemed to get a break but me, in the early years. But I wasn't bitter about it because I figured they got a break because they deserved it. But I thought *I* did too, at times. And finally—*finally*—when a lot of the kids started to play, and a lot of them were playing blues, they opened up a lot of doors for B.B. King. And I pray on it sometimes, and I say, 'Thank God, better late than never.' But I was never bitter. I don't feel I have a right to be bitter. You can't make people love you. They love you if they want. So it's the same thing about your playing. If you do it and do it well, somebody's going to appreciate it. Keep at it. People will appreciate it."

And Mr. King, we do appreciate your playing, singing, and your spirit. Many thousands of us love you, and your music will endure as long as there are guitarists on planet Earth playing the blues. You *are* the King of the Blues—yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Shane Fogerty

JOHN FOGERTY BAND

FACTOID
Fogerty's original "bat guitar" is now in the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

On May 3, 2015, John Fogerty's tech, Dave Whiston, and son/co-guitarist Shane Fogerty hung with PG to talk gear before the band's sold-out show at The Woods Amphitheater at Fontanel in Nashville.

GUITARS

Top Left: John Fogerty's main road guitar is a late-'60s or early-'70s Gibson Les Paul goldtop with a wraparound bridge and its original P-90 pickups, which really punch through the mix.

Top Right: Made by Phil Kubicki (builder of the famous Ex Factor bass from 1983), all three versions of Fogerty's iconic "bat guitar" feature an authentic Louisville Slugger brand and Strat-style electronics—a 5-way selector and a volume and two tone knobs—along the body's upper edge.

Right: Shane Fogerty's main guitar when touring with his dad is a stock 1996 Gibson Les Paul Custom that has Gibson Burstbucker pickups. The finish has been sanded from the back of the neck at his father's request.

AMPS

Top Two: To emulate the sounds Fogerty got from his old Kustom amps on the original versions of "Proud Mary" and "Bad Moon Rising," Fogerty runs a Diezel VH4 or a Diezel Herbert into a custom Ampeg 2x15 cab with Eminence Legend 15" guitar—not bass—speakers.

EFFECTS

Middle: Fogerty's effects rack—which is controlled from offstage by Whiston—includes a Wren and Cuff Box of War, three Xotic RC Boosters (named Moe, Larry, and Curly), a Boss RV-5, a Voodoo Lab Tremolo, and a Strymon BigSky (which is routed through the effects loop of his Cornford MK50H).

Bottom: Shane's pedalboard for gigs with his dad (as opposed to with his own band, Hearty Har) is pretty simple: It includes two Boss TU-3 tuners—one for acoustic, and one for electric—an Ernie Ball VP JR volume pedal, a 2-knob Keeley Compressor, a Wampler Hot Wired Brent Mason overdrive/distortion, a Strymon Deco, a Way Huge Echo Puss analog delay, and a Boss DD-3 digital delay. A Voodoo Lab Pedal Power 2 Plus juices the whole shebang.

Lzzy Hale and Joe Hottinger

HALESTORM

Halestorm invited Premier Guitar *to their secret rehearsal layer in Nashville, where, surrounded by walls of speakers and drenched in epilepsy-inspiring lights, Lzzy Hale and Joe Hottinger took a break to geek out over some spectacular gear. Hale with white on white Gibsons and Marshalls, Hottinger covering every sonic combination, the two Grammy-winning rockers dished the dirt on their two-guitar assault.*

FACTOID

On August 29, 2009, Halestorm shared the stage with Ronnie James Dio. It was Dio's final performance.

GUITARS

Left: Undoubtedly, Lzzy Hale's No. 1 is her 2014 Lzzy Hale Signature Explorer with Gibson '57 Classic pickups, an ebony fretboard featuring big block inlays, and a bound body. This sexy spaceship of a guitar is cloud white with gold hardware and is tuned to dropped-D.

Bottom: Joe Hottinger's life quest has been to find the perfect specimen of each guitar type. If he hasn't accomplished it, he's sure on his way. Here's a 2014 Gibson 335 Custom shop '63 reissue with Gibson '57 Classic pickups. All axes are strung with meaty Dunlop Nickel Wound Light/Heavy (.010–.052).

AMPS

Top: Hale is a no-nonsense woman, happy with the simple things, like a 2013 Marshall JCM800 special made for Lzzy in her signature white and gold. The Marshall drives two matching white 1960 Vintage 4x12 cabs.

Middle: It's a cool dichotomy to see two kick-backed, old-school Fender amps on a hard-rock stage, but that's how Hottinger rolls. One is a 2014 Fender Twin Reverb 2x12, the other is a creamy, early '90s Fender Tone Master with matching 2x12 cab.

EFFECTS

Bottom: Hale's signal runs from her guitar to a Line 6 Relay G50 wireless system. From there it hits an MXR Custom Audio Electronics Buffer, a Dunlop Jerry Cantrell Cry Baby Wah, an MXR Blue Box, an Electro-Harmonix POG2, and an MXR Custom Audio Electronics Boost/Line Driver. At the end of the line sits a Rockett Pedals Archer and a Boss TU-3. Patch cables are Mogami 2319 Low Noise with Neutrik connectors, cut to length. All of this rests on a Pedaltrain board powered by a Voodoo Labs Pedal Power 2+.

The Gibson

1923 Gibson Master Model F-5 Mandolin

BY DAVE ROGERS, LAUN BRAITHWAITE, AND TIM MULLALLY

Orville Gibson's mandolins and guitars of the late 1890s were the first to incorporate ideas borrowed from violin construction, such as carved solid tops and backs. His A- and F-style mandolin shapes are still used today.

Gibson mandolins became the instrument of choice for the mandolin orchestras popular in the early 1900s. But by World War I, interest in mandolins was waning as the banjo became all the rage in early jazz ensembles. Gibson was in financial trouble after the war (even after introducing their own banjos in 1918), so the company decided to create the ultimate mandolin, guitar, and banjo line. These instruments became known as "Master Models."

In 1919 Gibson hired Lloyd Loar, an established performer, composer, and acoustic engineer. He was in charge of designing what became the Style 5 group of Master Models. These included the F-5 mandolin, the H-5 mandola, the K-5 mandocello, and the L-5 guitar. Loar took Orville Gibson's idea of violin-influenced design even further by introducing f-shaped soundholes (rather than one oval soundhole in the center), graduated carving of tops and backs, and the tap-tuning of various components to particular scale degrees to make each section contribute to the instrument's timbre (a technique used by Antonio Stradivari and his family on their 17th- and 18th-century violins). To guarantee the quality of these superior instruments, Loar tested each one and signed the label before it left the factory. Loar signed these Master Models from 1922 until he left Gibson in late 1924.

While the Style 5 Master Models were some of the finest fretted instruments yet made, they did not revive the popularity of the mandolin orchestra as Gibson had hoped. The L-5 guitar gradually became accepted, and it eventually replaced the banjo as a jazz rhythm and solo instrument, leading to the Super 400 and beyond. It took the F-5 mandolin many more years to be recognized, helped by bluegrass originator Bill Monroe finding a 1923 model in a barber shop and using it as his main instrument from the late 1940s through the end of his career. A Loar-signed F-5 is now considered the holy grail for bluegrass mandolinists, much like a Stradivarius for a classical violinist, or a 1959 Les Paul Standard for a rock guitarist.

The 1923 list price was $250. The current value for one in excellent all-original condition is $225,000.

Sources for this article include: *Gibson Guitars: 100 Years of an American Icon* by Walter Carter, *The Gibson L5: Its History and Its Players* by Adrian Ingram, *The Gibson Story* by Julius Bellson, *Spann's Guide to Gibson 1902-1941* by Joseph E. Spann, and an online article by Roger Siminoff ("Lloyd Allayre Loar, 1886-1943").

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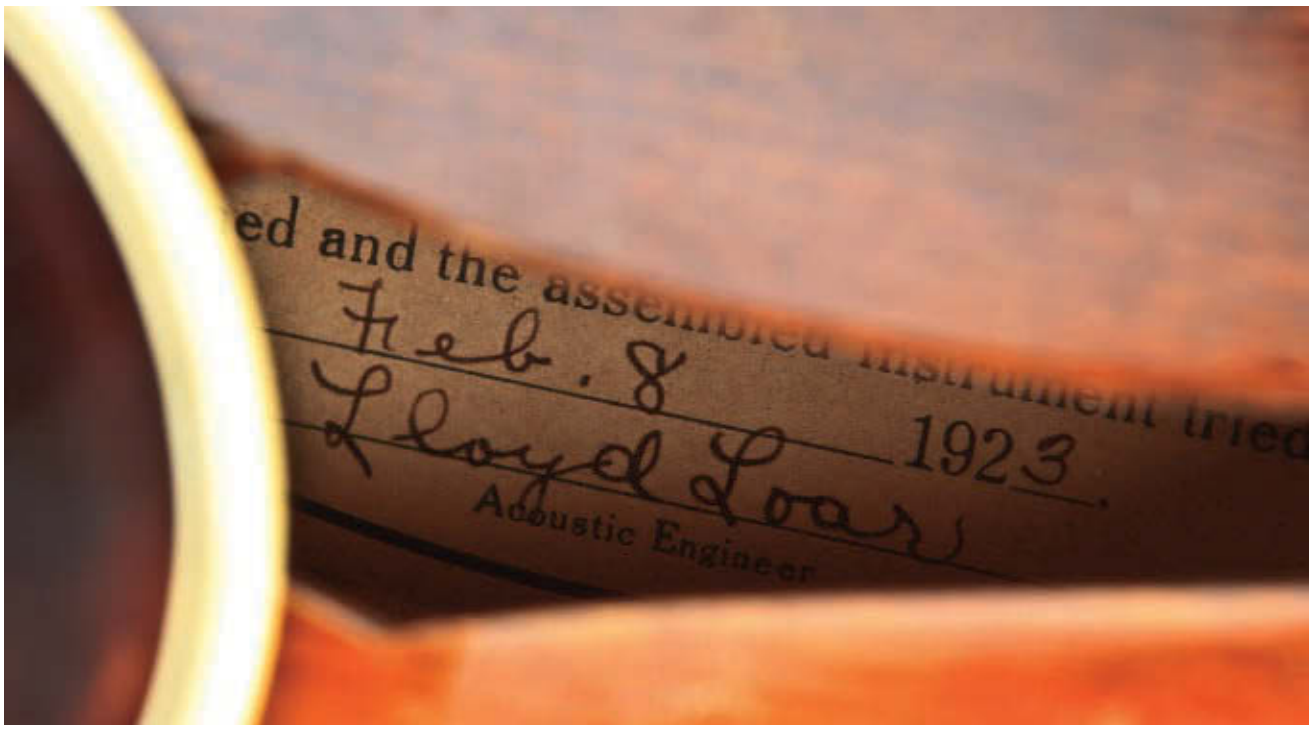

Opposite page: Gibson's Master Model F-5 is probably the most coveted mandolin of all time. The back boasts gloriously figured wood.

Left: Lloyd Loar inspected and signed each instrument before it left the factory.

To hear this guitar, click here to head online to ***premierguitar.com***

2002 Folk-Art Fender Strat

BY WILL RAY

One of my favorite 6-string events is South Carolina's Spartanburg Guitar Show. It's only about an hour from my house, and I always seem to walk away with something. On my most recent visit, I rode down with fellow Asheville guitarist David Holt. As we were strolling toward the venue, we encountered a guy leaving the show with a cool-looking, well-thrashed Fender Strat strapped around his neck (**Photo 1**). Darn, I thought, too late to snag that one.

I asked if he'd bought the Strat at the show and was surprised to learn he'd simply been trying to sell it but had no takers. He handed it to me to try out. Because of its old, heavy strings and high action, it played terribly. I noticed the tremolo was adjusted incorrectly, leaving the bridge poking up too high. An easy fix, if you're handy with Strats. The seller also showed me where the headstock had been split and repaired before he got it (**Photo 2**). It looked like a decent repair to me.

The original pickguard had been removed and replaced with what looked like a piece of kitchen countertop with floral designs.

On the plus side, this thing just dripped mojo. The 2002 Fender body had been stripped of its original black paint and stained in an artsy way to look older. The original pickguard had been removed and replaced with what looked like a piece of kitchen countertop with floral designs. It had a mini-humbucker neck pickup and a lipstick bridge pickup, wired to a 5-way selector switch, a mystery 2-position switch, and a single volume control. A push-button kill switch on the lower bout was configured to mute everything when pressed. But the icing on the cake? The eye hooks and C-clamps that served as strap buttons (**Photo 3**). This guitar resembled a piece of folk art.

1

2

3

David and I were in a hurry to see the show, so I quickly negotiated the price down from $200 to $125. Logic said no, but my gut said *yes*, so I pulled out the cash and paid the owner. David stashed the Strat in his car, and then we explored the entire show. I didn't see anything there I wanted more than what I'd just bought.

Bottom Feeder Tip #385: Sometimes you must quickly make a gut decision about buying a guitar. It's a gamble, but the more you know about setup and repair, the better your odds of coming out ahead.

Back home, I got to work. After a preliminary cleaning, I tested the pickups (both worked), put on new strings, and blocked off the tremolo with a piece of wood to lower the action and keep the guitar in tune.

So how does it sound? Listen to my audio samples. The 5-way switch blends the two pickups in strange ways I rather like. The extra 2-way switch allows you to set a lower volume for rhythm, and then hit the switch to play a wide-open solo. This guitar has been played a lot, and I will continue to uphold that tradition.

WILL RAY *is a founding member of the Hellecasters guitar-twang trio. He also does guitar clinics promoting his namesake G&L signature model 6-string, and produces artists and bands at his studio in Asheville, North Carolina. You can contact Will on Facebook and at willray.biz.*

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Violent Invention

The Creatively Aggressive Guitar Work of Mackenzie "Torres" Scott

BY TZVI GLUCKIN

Macon native and Brooklyn transplant Mackenzie Scott—aka Torres—commands much attention these days. *Rolling Stone* called her "a force to be reckoned with" and *NPR* thinks that *Sprinter*, her new release, "is an album we're going to be talking about throughout the year." But they're just stating the obvious: Scott is a powerhouse. Her songs are emotional juggernauts that fuse intense lyrics with an onslaught of fantastically creative guitar work.

Scott's tone palette is immense. She conjures sonic colors ranging from edgy and abrasive to delicate and subtle. Her right-hand approach is unorthodox: classical-style fingerpicking on an electric, usually a beautiful black Gibson ES-335 or an abused Fender Jazzmaster. She enhances it via her collection of mostly boutique pedals and a cranked Fender Blues Junior. Her innovative capo use pushes the creative envelope even further.

Though raised in Macon, Georgia—home to the Allman Brothers, Otis Redding, and Little Richard—Scott was unconnected to her hometown's rich musical past. "I grew up mostly oblivious to the fact that all these greats had come from my hometown," she says. "It's pretty funny, actually." She listened to '90s pop and sang Broadway show tunes, but eventually gravitated to the disparate sound worlds of Johnny Cash and Nirvana. "I discovered everything that I really love later, when I was in college."

With its dark moods and understated intensity, *Sprinter*—Scott's second release—is a testament to her growth as a songwriter and her inventiveness as a guitarist. It was recorded at an alternative space in Dorset, England, with Robert Ellis (PJ Harvey). "It was a room that had formerly been used as a children's nursery," says Scott. "The owners converted it into a space conducive to bands and artists." Some recording was also done at the studio of Adrian Utley (Portishead), and Ellis, Utley, and others play on the album. "Rob got musician friends of his to play on the record," she says. "They were all very generous—with their time and otherwise."

We spoke with Scott about her influences, unorthodox playing style, and gear, and how she creates such wide-ranging tones. Despite the dark themes and rock 'n' roll swagger of her music, Scott proved easygoing, humble, and fun to talk to.

Photo by Shawn Brackbill

Scott bears down on her battered Fender Jazzmaster.

When did you start playing guitar?
I was about 15 or 16. I was in a youth group with this girl who played guitar. I thought it was so cool. I'd had a guitar for years, but I'd never really touched it. I finally picked it up and started teaching myself.

Did you want to become a guitarist, or did you see it more as a vehicle for singing and songwriting?
It was more about the singing and songwriting at first. I suppose it still is—that's always the priority for me. At the time it was definitely a vehicle for the poetry I was writing. I was just starting to sing and let some family members and friends hear me, which was hard for me to do. At first, guitar gave me something to hold while I was singing—something to hide behind. But now the guitar has been completely transformed for me.

How so?
I don't really play acoustic anymore. I play it at home, but I really just like the electric. I'm just learning, figuring out what I like to play and trying to get better at it. I especially love fingerpicking on the electric guitar. I've loved doing that since I picked up the electric guitar.

I noticed that you don't use a pick.
I don't.

Are you looking for a specific timbre, or is that more just how you play?
That's just how I play. When I initially started teaching myself, it was only fingerpicking. For some reason my inclination was to play "classically" rather than strum power chords. Eventually I had some classical lessons, which reinforced that preexisting inclination. When I started playing electric guitar I realized I could plug in and use some really sweet pedals for some sonic variation while playing in that style. That's something that I continued to do. I still don't use a pick.

Do you use your nails or the flesh of your fingers?
I use both. Actually, the index finger on my right hand is permanently disfigured on the front. It's always skinned, and my nail is always halfway off.

Do you hold your index finger and use it like a pick?
Yeah, I do. I switch back and forth between fingerpicking and strumming with my nail.

When did you get your 335?
It was a collective Christmas gift from my entire family a few years ago. I'd had my eye on it for a couple of years, but I never thought I'd ever have a guitar like that. It's my dream guitar. I don't bring it out on the road as much as I'd like to because I'm terrified of something happening to it.

Did you mod anything on it?
No, I didn't do anything to it. I'm thinking of taking off the Bigsby, though, because it makes it go out of tune so easily. But it's a beautiful guitar, and I love the semi-hollow design. I love the way the neck feels. It's a heavy guitar—it's big and burdensome. But my 335 makes me feel like I have something massive in my arms *growling*. It's a beast.

It must feed back easily.
Oh, yes. If I plug it into any of the pedals I have and turn my amp up, I can just hold it in the air, and it feeds back.

You really use that feedback on the album.
I did, yeah. I let that happen naturally.

You have a Jazzmaster too.
I do. I love the Jazzmaster. It's a lot lighter than the 335. I love the neck on it. I like the range. And it gives me more room to get a little violent with it. My 335 has to be handled with care, but I just *rip* on the Jazzmaster. There have been times when I played it, finished a song, and then took it off and threw it on the ground.

Really?
And it totally holds up. It's great.

You're the second person I've spoken to recently who trashes Jazzmasters.
I don't know why. The Jazzmaster is just *asking* to be thrown around.

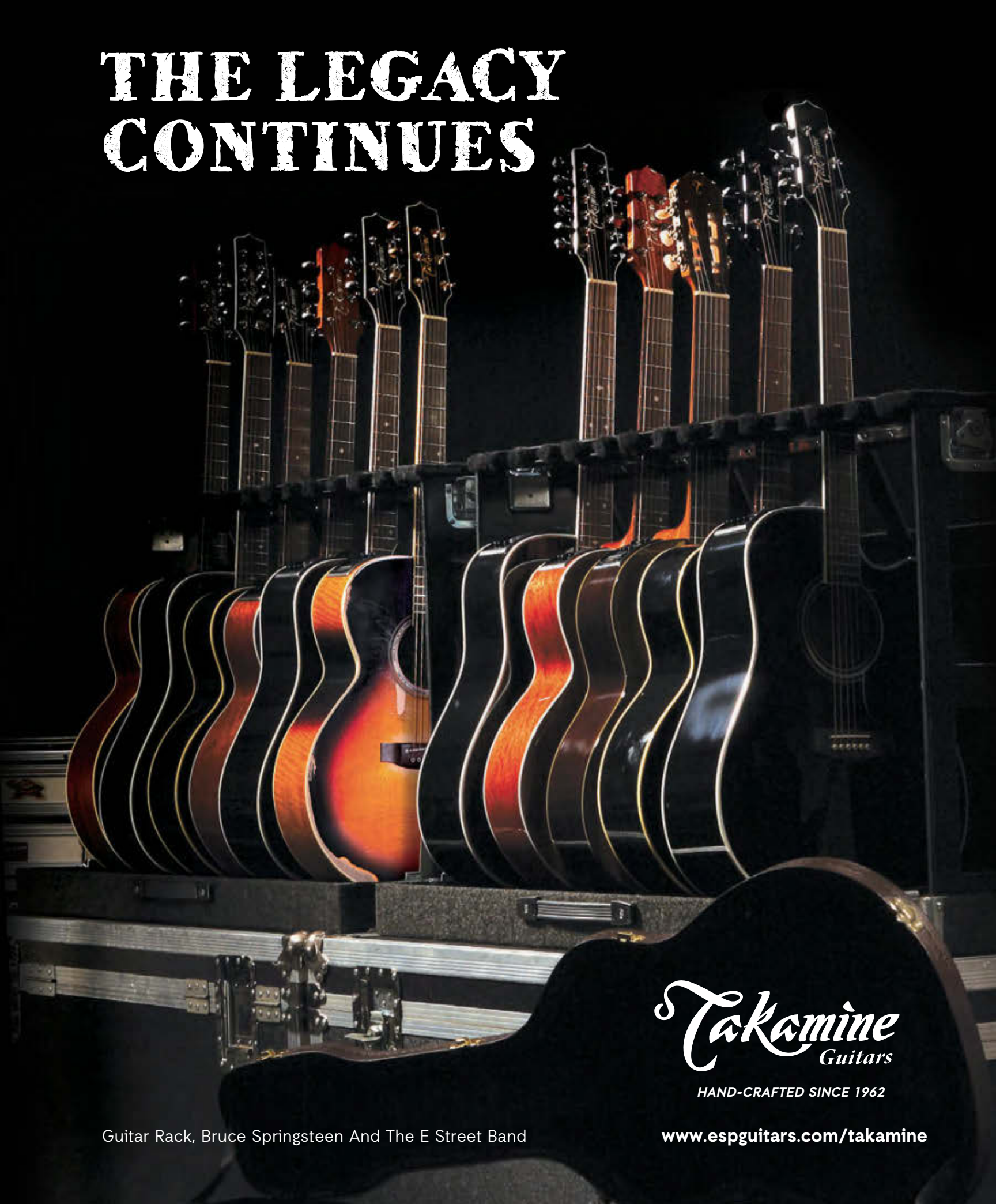
Photo by Chris Kies

MACKENZIE SCOTT'S GEAR

GUITARS
Recent-model Gibson ES-335 (stock)
Recent-model Fender Jazzmaster (stock)
Vintage Silvertone 1435

AMPS
Fender Blues Junior

EFFECTS
Fulltone Fulldrive2 MOSFET
Fulltone OCD
Earthquaker Devices Organizer
Line 6 DL4
Death By Audio Echo Dream 2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You don't play many open chords, yet you often use a capo. Why?
The capo allows me to get strange sounds when I'm fingerpicking. I experiment with the capo, fiddling around till I find some sort of hook that I can play repetitively. The capo gives me more options.

Are you looking for different harmonics, or different ways to use open strings?
I play with open strings sometimes when I'm doing that. It allows me to move more freely on the guitar without having to barre with my finger. It gives me a variation in notes and makes it easier for me.

You've said your goal is to become a better and better player. What do you do to grow as a guitarist?
What I do is listen to records I've never heard before—that I never would have listened to—and expose myself to styles I didn't even know about. As I am evolving, becoming an adult, my musical tastes are expanding. I'm listening to a lot of Robert Fripp and Funkadelic—stuff I never had any real appreciation for until the last couple of years. Captain Beefheart, too.

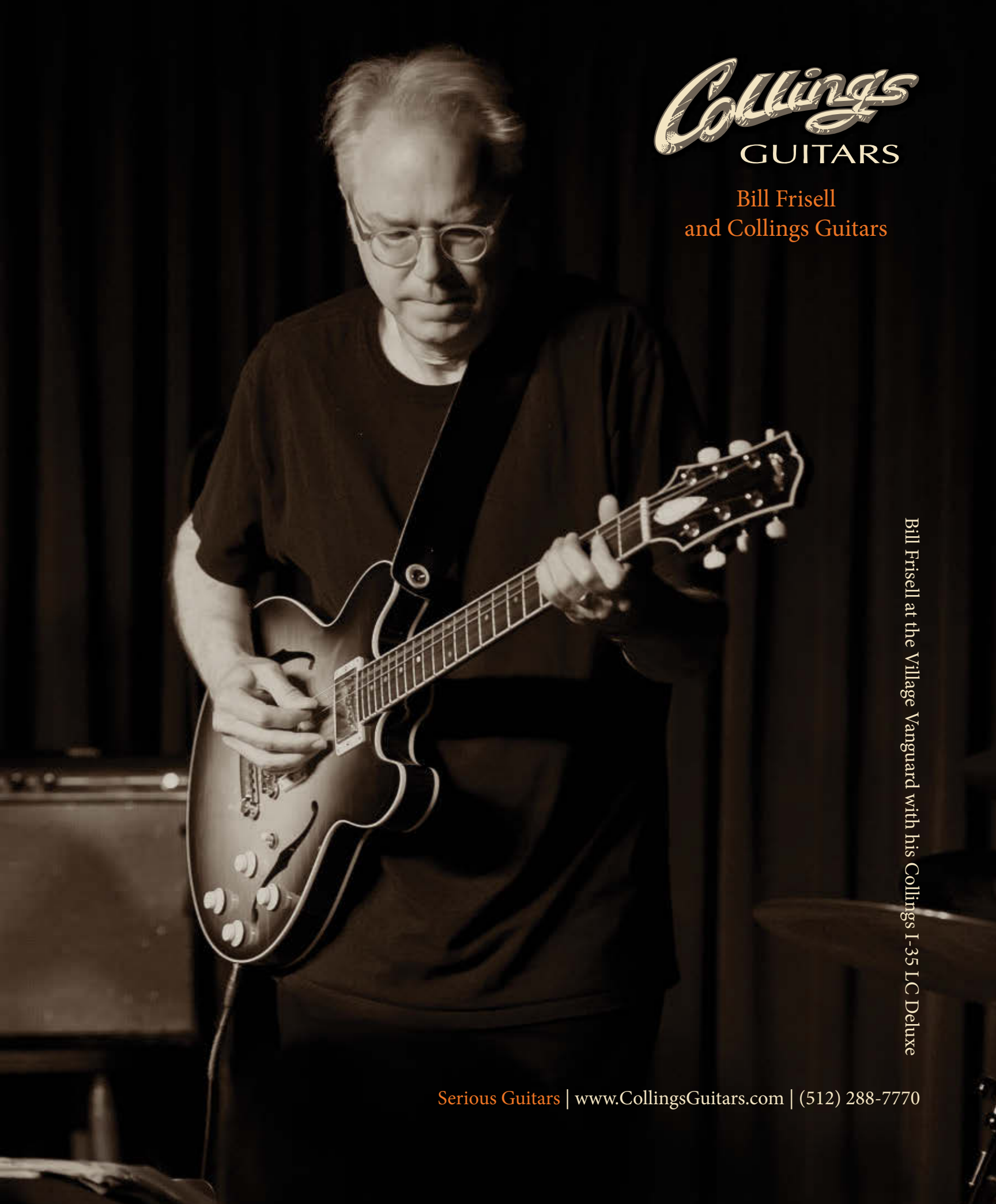
"The Jazzmaster is just *asking* to be thrown around."

Which album?
Trout Mask Replica—I guess it's the most famous one. You'd think maybe I would have heard that earlier in life. But that's the theme: Not hearing about the classics until I'm in my twenties.

How about Funkadelic?
Maggot Brain, the self-titled one, *Free Your Mind ... and Your Ass Will Follow*—all that stuff. I love it. I'm still obsessed with Nirvana, but I know what *that* sounds like. I'm trying to listen to stuff I haven't before, letting it seep in. Once something slips into my subconscious, it's only a matter of time before I start experimenting in that vein on the guitar.

Talk about your songwriting process. Do you craft music to fit your lyrics, or do you come up with riffs and write lyrics later?
It's a little of both, but primarily the former: I have a lyrical idea that I then base a melodic hook around. But sometimes they come at the same time.

Does the meaning of your lyrics warp into something different once you put music to them?
The lyrics definitely take on multiple meanings. But the lyrics heavily dictate the melodies, which is the most effective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way that I've been able to write songs thus far. I have a hard time writing melodies that aren't dictated by a lyric.

Do you use effects as songwriting tools, or do you search for specific sounds only after the songs are written?
It's more the latter, especially for this record. I wasn't writing with the pedals, but as soon as the lyrics were written, I was working on the sounds. I had the melodies—I was just trying to get the sounds for the recording. A lot of times I had the sonic palette in my head, and I was fiddling with the pedals to get the exact sounds that I heard.

Robert Ellis coproduced your new album. Was part of his role helping you to figure out some of those sounds?
The guitar sounds were mostly established before I went to England to record with Rob, but he definitely helped me to solidify the sounds of the other instruments on the record.

Did he play on the record, too?
He played drums, synthesizers, and some random toys. His primary role was producing with me and playing some killer drums.

What's the cool effect at the end of "New Skin?"
There are a few layers there. I played my regular part, and then we detuned a couple of guitars—one sharp and one flat—and played them over the top to make everything sound warbled and out of tune.

You can hear a lot of finger noise on "A Proper Polish Welcome," but it seems obvious that you did that on purpose.
I wanted to create some subtle atmosphere. On that song I'm sliding my hand across the strings because it's the smoothest transition I can make, but I didn't see the string noise as something to be eliminated.

What guitar do you use in the video for the solo version of "Cowboy Guilt?"
That's a vintage Silvertone—I believe it's from the '50s or '60s. A friend put it up for sale, and I immediately replied, "I want it."

Do you take that on the road?
I haven't yet. I have some setting up to do—it has a few broken knobs and things that need to be fixed. It hasn't been tampered with since it was originally made. After I make some updates, I think I will be taking it on the road.

The solo version of "Cowboy Guilt" is very different from what you put on the album. How do you get those tones on the album?
That's mainly the EarthQuaker Devices Organizer pedal. For the live solo version I chose to play it as it was originally written, before I added the effect.

You can see how you use the capo in that solo video. The open strings create a nice little dissonance.
Yeah. That was one of the things I was talking about when I said that using the capo gives me a bit more freedom when I'm trying to figure out a melody on the guitar. I got a sound using the capo on the second fret that I wouldn't have gotten if I'd played that song in standard tuning without a capo.

Live, you augment your lineup with a second guitarist. Do you have a specific role in mind?
Yes, I do. I often switch from playing rhythm to lead guitar in the middle of the song, and I have the second guitarist pick up the rhythm part.

Are you specific about what you want, or do you give the other guitarist room to be creative?
A lot of times I have a specific part that I want each band member to play, and sometimes there is a little more freedom. Cameron Kapoor, the guitar player on the road with me now, is an extremely innovative player, and he really works well within the sonic world I created on this album. I was able to give him a lot more freedom than I've given players in the past because I trust his instincts. I tell him if I don't like something, or give direction if I want him to switch gears.

YOUTUBE IT

Scott leads her band (including co-guitarist Cameron Kapoor) through a dynamic rendition of the title track from Sprinter.
YouTube search term: Torres Sprinter Live on Soundcheck

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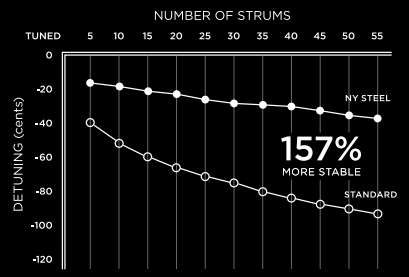

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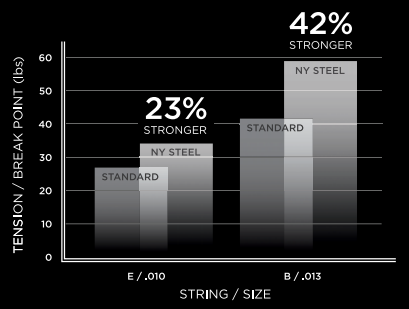

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CHILDLIKE WONDER

My Morning Jacket sonic shaman ***Jim James*** *and guitar scientist* ***Carl Broemel*** *plunge into deep musical currents on* The Waterfall.

| BY TESSA JEFFERS |

Photo by Atlas Icons / Chris Schwegler

My Morning Jacket guitarists Carl Broemel (left) and Jim James (right) have been playing together since 2004. When James gets bored with the guitar, he says Broemel is "really good at bringing my guitar playing back to life."

Jim James tells us he was first summoned to music as a child while watching *The Muppet Show*. It must be a really vivid memory, because when he wrote an article about his musical coming of age for his hometown magazine, *Louisville*, he also recounted how Kermit the Frog blew his mind. If you listen closely to the vocal delivery on "Gideon," from My Morning Jacket's 2005 album, *Z*, you might even catch a trace of Kermit's spirit and inflection.

So why does he—and why do *we*—love Muppets? They're funny. They possess an innocence and deep character that overshadows the mundane surface interactions of the modern world. They're human, if you will, while somehow always remaining light. They have magic about them.

My Morning Jacket makes epic, sometimes psychedelic rock songs that live somewhere in that *other* world. It's not easy to put a finger on the musical genre of the quintet (James, co-guitarist Carl Broemel, bassist Tom Blankenship, drummer Patrick Hallahan, and keyboardist Bo Koster). James draws parallels between MMJ's sound and his Kentucky hometown: "It just kind of exists in its own realm, and that's what I've always wanted to be seen as: nothing other than someone who likes music and wants to play it without definitions or boundaries."

The group's latest 10-song collection, *The Waterfall*, was inspired by the natural phenomenon, but it also seems to reference the downpour of conflicts that arise between people. But that's another thing about Muppets: They have camaraderie, and they weather storms with a little help from their friends.

As a stream ebbs and flows, so do all aspects of life, including guitar playing. James, the group's primary songwriter, had grown bored with the guitar before the sessions for MMJ's seventh album and didn't want to play. But that's not how it worked out—James' yang in the band, Broemel, inspired him by bringing in a rare piece of gear to play with. (More on that later).

With a reputation for unforgettable live performances that take cinematic soundscapes to the sky and back, My Morning Jacket is the epitome of the band that makes its music come alive onstage. "A year ago we got to play with Bob Weir," Broemel recalls. "He would stay stuff like, 'If we don't play the songs, the songs aren't alive.' We were like, 'Yes! That's exactly it.' It's not so much about repetition as constantly exploring and playing."

Sounds like something the Muppets might say in a rallying moment.

Can you recall the "*aha!*" moment when you realized you were supposed to play music?

Jim James: When I was a kid watching *The Muppet Show*, I was fascinated by the band, and the music always called to me. In 7th grade, a group of us bonded together over music. There were four or five of us who felt like outcasts, and we had music to keep us together.

Around that time, hair metal was super popular. We were all into hair metal, but also intimidated by it, like we were too dorky to wear leather pants and do the whole hair metal thing. Then grunge happened. I remember really loving R.E.M.'s *Out of Time* record, and being so moved by the fact that they just looked like normal guys. You didn't have to be this crazy rocker—you could just play your music. And of course, watching Nirvana, Pearl Jam, and all the great bands of that era let us know it was okay to do music if we wanted to.

Carl Broemel: I don't remember deciding to play music—I was just kind of *doing* it. My dad is retired now, but he was a bassoon player in the Indianapolis Symphony. I was always taking violin or piano lessons and hanging out with him. But I do remember deciding around age 12 or 13 that I didn't want to take violin lessons anymore, and that I wanted to try saxophone, flute, or guitar. Once I started playing guitar, I just felt that connection. Hearing a song on the radio, getting excited, and then being able to do it myself was like, "This is awesome! I get this, and I think I want to keep doing it." My dad was like, "Really?!"

Who were some of your heroes?

Broemel: When I was in middle school, I would've given anything to be in Bryan Adams' band. He was *the* guitar player [*laughs*]. I was into metal, Van Halen, and stuff like that. I remember seeing Europe play at the Indiana State Fairgrounds and thinking it was amazing. There was something about the way Eddie Van Halen played that reminded me of classical music. All along, my dad

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Carl Broemel's No. 1 axe is a 1988 Gibson Les Paul Standard with a Bigsby. "I've had this guitar for long enough that there's a spot on the back of the neck that I made over years and years," he says.

was trying to get me informed, saying, "If you like Eddie Van Halen, you should listen to Segovia too."

What was your first guitar?

James: My bud Aaron's dad had gotten a white Harmony strat. We walked in and saw it lying on the table one day and were both filled with awe. It's so funny to look back now at that $100 guitar, but we'd never seen anything like it in the flesh, and we wanted to know it in every way we could. Aaron played that, I got a Fender Squier Stratocaster, and we just started going for it. From that moment on, I was possessed, just captivated. And it hasn't let me go.

Broemel: I had some super-cheap, small, blue-and-white electric guitar—I don't even know what brand it was. It looked like a Teisco, but even cheaper and crappier. We plugged it into car stereo speakers, which were fun because they distorted. I got a Yamaha heavy metal guitar after that.

How has being from Kentucky informed My Morning Jacket's sound?

James: We've always taken a lot of pride in being from Louisville. It gives us a different perspective on the world. I think people confuse Louisville if they're not from here. Northerners think it's a Southern place,

CARL BROEMEL'S GEAR

GUITARS

Duesenberg Starplayer TV
1960s Gretsch Tennessean
1988 Gibson Les Paul Standard with Bigsby
GFI S-10 pedal steel
1960s Gibson SG Jr.
Gibson Les Paul Jr.
Gibson Les Paul goldtop
Duesenberg Caribou
Duesenberg Double Cat 12-string

AMPS

Fender Princeton Reverb
Tweed Fender Deluxe
Fender Vibrosonic (for pedal steel)
3 Monkeys Orangutan
3 Monkeys Grease Monkey
Carr Slant 6V
'67 Fender Vibrolux
Magnatone Twilighter
Maestro Reverb-Echo

EFFECTS

Roland Space Echo
Eventide H9
Electro-HarmonixPOG
Electro-Harmonix Freeze
Fulltone Full-Drive 2
Fulltone Tube Tape Echo
Durham Electronics Sex Drive
SIB Mr. Echo
Boss RV-5 Digital Reverb
Hudson Electronics Stroll On Fuzz
Spaceman Saturn V Harmonic Booster
Spaceman Sputnik
Xotic SP Compressor
Fulltone Supa-Trem
Pete Cornish buffers
Empress Tape Delay
Fulltone Wah
GigRig G2 pedal switcher
Vox Tone Bender
Hilton volume pedal (for pedal steel)
Moog Analog Delay (pedal steel)
EarthQuaker Devices Dispatch Master (pedal steel)
Eventide ModFactor (pedal steel)

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Signature yellow Dunlop Tortex .73 mm picks

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Jim James will always love his Flying V, but lately his go-to guitar is a 1962 Gibson Barney Kessel, played here while wearing his new favorite jacket.

JIM JAMES' GEAR

GUITARS

1962 Gibson Barney Kessel
Custom 2008 Breedlove Revival 000
1950s Martin 000
Gibson J-185
Gretsch Super Axe
1999 Gibson Flying V
1975 Fender Strat
Two Gibson ES-335s

AMPS

3 Monkeys Orangutan head and 2x12 cabinet
Mesa/Boogie Trem-O-Verb head
Fender Princeton Reverb

EFFECTS

Boss BD-2 Blues Driver
Boss RV-3 Digital Reverb/Delay
Boss TU-2 Tuner
SIB Mr. Echo
ZVEX Box of Rock
ZVEX Woolly Mammoth
EarthQuaker Devices Monarch Overdrive
EarthQuaker Devices Ghost Echo
Malekko Spring Chicken Reverb

PICKS & STRINGS

D'Addario EXL115 sets (electric)
D'Addario EJ17 sets (acoustic)
Dunlop Tortex .88 mm picks

and Southerners think it's a Northern place. We're not Nashville, Chicago, New York, or L.A. We're our own special thing that we really identify with. I think people who come here to play shows or to visit can feel that energy as well.

Broemel: I'm from Indiana, but we feel at home in Louisville. The trees are big. It just feels like a nice old, mid-South town that's been there forever. It feels like they hold onto history there—more so than a place like Nashville, which seems like it's turning over. I like Kentucky because it feels like it's filled with ghosts.

James: There's a forest here, and there are so many trees. We always talk about how the trees hide the ghosts and that they live in the trees. If the trees weren't here, the ghosts wouldn't have anywhere to go—they'd float off into space or whatever. For some reason, there's a heavy magnetic concentration of ghosts here, like in New Orleans. Every place has ghosts, but there are some really special ghosts here.

Environment seems to inspire MMJ. Tell us about the vibe of Stinson Beach, California, where you recorded *The Waterfall*.

James: It's like being on Mars or something. I've described it as like being on the moon, but the moon is cold and dark, and it's definitely not cold and dark there. Everything is heightened. Everything is broadened. Being near the ocean is really powerful. It was the first time I'd made a record where I could look at the ocean the whole time we played. That was very profound. The redwood forest and Muir Woods are there, and the sunsets on top of Mount Tamalpais are so epic and beautiful. Everything was more dramatic, but in a very peaceful way. It felt like we were the only people there, existing on our own little planet.

Broemel: It was amazing! It was like the ultimate vacation. We lived in houses on the beach and could hike up to the studio in the morning and hike back at night. You could take a 45-minute walk on the beach and through the forest to the studio. We'd take nighttime walks on the road and look at the stars. It was a nice ceremony of going to work and going home.

Photo by Dave Vann

Jim, do you have an obsession with waterfalls?
James: [*Laughs*.] For a little while I have. I wrote the song about the waterfall, and I've been collecting old pictures of waterfalls in antique stores and from eBay—cool waterfall pictures people took on vacation, or whatever.

What is it about waterfalls?
James: I firmly believe there's not always a rational explanation for everything. Some of the biggest things of life can't be explained. Why did this person die in a car wreck yesterday? Why did this person live to be 95? There are all these things you can't explain. I just feel called to some things, and for whatever reason, I felt called to the waterfall. When I see a waterfall, I feel this crazy sense of *everything*. It's so violent, and you know it could smash and kill you, or you could fall off it and die. But it's also so peaceful, so hypnotic and natural. I always have this urge to pause it like a video, go back behind the waterfall, lie down in the cave, and just get some rest. I feel like life is a waterfall. It's rushing at you so fast, and you can't control it. You feel so overwhelmed by life that you need to pause and stop it, in a good way. I was thinking about that when we were mixing in Portland, Oregon. There's a drive where you can see some beautiful waterfalls. I drove there a couple times just to clear my head, and that cemented the feeling that the waterfall was the right image for the record.

Take us inside My Morning Jacket's songwriting process.
Broemel: It changes, depending on the song. It used to be more explicit: Jim would come in with fleshed-out ideas that were basically demoed at home. Now he spends less and less time finishing demoes, leaving it more open-ended. He'll even just sing a melody into his phone, or send us a fast acoustic guitar demo. On the last record and this one, we didn't do any preproduction. We didn't rehearse. We just set everything up and started recording. We record the song in every manifestation until we finally think it's done. We kicked those songs around a lot! If the gods are with you, after a day or so, you've got it [*laughs*].

Jim, do you write on a particular guitar?
James: It's changed over the years. My parents gave me a Takamine acoustic guitar when I was a kid, and I wrote on that for years and years. But I've developed a new way of writing: I write in my head, and then just grab whatever guitar is around. I keep just a couple of guitars at home. I've got an old 1950s Martin parlor guitar and a Gibson ES-335. I wrote a lot of *The Waterfall* on a Gibson Barney Kessel I found that I really love. Last night I was playing another favorite: my mom's guitar when she was a kid, just an old, no-name kid's guitar from the '50s.

My Morning Jacket is a live-to-tape kind of band, but this time you tried a more digital approach.
James: When I did my solo album [*Regions of Light and Sound of God*] I worked a lot by chopping things up on the computer and putting them in strange places to see what that sounded like. I got to do some of that on this record because there were a couple of songs, like "Spring" and

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The cover art for MMJ's new record was inspired by vintage photos and actual waterfalls in Portland, Oregon. "I just feel called to some things, and for whatever reason, I felt called to the waterfall," says Jim James.

"In Its Infancy," where I didn't know what I wanted the end result to be, though I knew all the parts. So we would do the parts live to tape, and then I would go into the computer and move them around, trying to create happy accidents.

Broemel: Yeah, that sums up the record. We still set up, played together, and recorded to tape in our "normal" way. But there were a few songs where we just recorded sections, and Jim made a collage out of them on his computer. Then we relearned it and replayed some of it on top of that. "Spring (Among the Living)" was the song where we used a completely new method.

Being in the studio is the ultimate balancing act. Today's technology is daunting, and there are so many ways to look at it as a guitar player: "Do I use all analog gear? Do I use Axe-Fx?"

I saw Les Paul play at the Iridium before he passed away, and the guy who invented multi-tracking had a Line 6 reverb pedal. He just used what was available and didn't question whether he should because of some moral standard.

So the collage method worked out?

James: Oh, I love it. That's the amazing part about where we are now. I think we have to be in the middle, for recording especially. You have sounds from yesterday—tape and old microphones—and you have the technology of today, which is what can make us different. That's why the retro mindset—and I used to be like that myself—is a limited and uneducated way of thinking. Digital technology has gotten to where it sounds really amazing. It's not the '90s anymore. If you ignore the world of the computer, you're staying in the past. And it's a really fun world!

What's your favorite guitar of all time?

Broemel: It's a tough call. The Duesenburg Starplayer is awesome, but if I lost my black Les Paul I'd be crushed. I've had it for so long that there's a spot on the back of the neck that I made over years and years. I'll have that one forever. You always get hot and bothered about your new guitars and gear, but it's nice to have something you can always go back to.

James: All guitars are like different spirits that feel good for some things but not right for others. Lately the Barney Kessel has felt right for all the new stuff, but then there's older stuff where my Flying V feels right. My main acoustic touring guitar is a custom Breedlove. I love it because acoustic guitars normally sound like shit live, but this thing really sounds good.

Do you still play your Flying V a lot live?

James: Yeah, there are certain songs where only the V will do. It's like a sword or something—even if I haven't played it in a while, it's like an old friend that comes right back to me as soon as I pick it up.

How do you split guitar duties?

Broemel: We just kind of pass it around. I wait and see what [Jim] wants to do, let him establish what he wants to cover, and we let it fall into place and trade off things. There's no "I have no solos on this record!" attitude.

James: It's fun to work with Carl because we're very different. He's such an emotional player, but also so educated. He knows different chord combinations and he knows what notes he's playing, He can play pedal steel, and he's so interested in switching out pedals and the speakers on his amps—he's constantly doing research. I'm the exact opposite: I'm like a three-year-old child, happy to bang on the guitar as long as nothing breaks. I sometimes find a new guitar or pedal or whatever, but they usually find me. I don't usually want to do all the technical stuff that Carl's so great at.

A lot of times Carl reinvigorates my desire to play. I love playing guitar, but sometimes I get tired of it as a vehicle and want to use something else. I don't have an undying love for the guitar above all else—I also love keyboards and bass. Before this record, I thought, "I'll just sing—I don't even want to play." But then Carl comes in with, like, some new weird reverb tank. He's really good at bringing my guitar playing back to life.

You recorded enough music for two albums.

Broemel: Yeah, there's definitely more music, and we have to wrap our heads around what we want to do with it. We're going to try to tidy that up when we get off the road. We're saying we're going to put out records back to back, faster than we've ever done. There will be some similarities, but some of the songs on the next record are *very* different from what's on *The Waterfall*.

Carl, when *Premier Guitar* last spoke with you, you'd only been studying pedal steel for a few years. How has your pedal-steel playing progressed? Do you still approach it as "an ambient thing?"

Broemel: My ambient playing is decent, but I'm still studying and learning. There's just so many ways to look at that guitar—it's mind-bending. It's a lifelong journey. Sometimes you get numb to the fact that there's so much to discover about the guitar. It's like the biggest library in the world.

I love guitar with evil low end, so I think "Thin Line" is very interesting. How did you approach the guitars on that one?

Broemel: Yeah, that main riff has a really long guitar bend, and then Bo added keyboards, and then we added the strings, so it's a super-long swooping bend. It's an eyes-rolling-back-in-your-head sound. We finished that one in a few hours, as opposed to "Spring," which took weeks. Jim walked down the stairs, plugged into the mixing board, and played a quick solo. It was like, "Alright!" It's fun to watch Jim play because it seems to come out of nowhere. He just plugs in and goes *branggg*, and it's done.

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What are some of your best memories from the *Waterfall* sessions?

Broemel: Jim and I had a fun gear revelation. I went to the Marin County Guitar Show just to take a break, and I brought back this reverb/echo amp made by Maestro. It has two banana clips that you clip onto your main amp, and somehow it sucks the signal in. It's basically just 100 percent wet reverb. It was fun. Jim was having a blast. He was like, "I love playing guitar again!"

James: I'll always remember sitting in the control room with the back door open. You could walk outside and still hear what was being played. It was just so beautiful, walking out to look at the stars, feel the breeze, and hear the music come out. I still feel that every time I hear this music. There are so many memories trapped inside this record for all of us, but that's probably my favorite.

What makes for exciting guitar playing? What still turns you on about it?

Broemel: I never question why I still love it. But I saw Bill Frisell at Belcourt Theatre here in Nashville. He did a soundtrack to a black-and-white film about the 1927 flood of the Mississippi. It was unbelievable. He's a good example of what I love about great guitar playing. He's got the global vision of what guitar can be. There was one section in particular where they were showing stills of Sonny Boy Williamson and a bunch of Delta blues musicians, and he played this beautiful chorale solo guitar piece. I was like, "That's the best thing I've heard in so long." You could just tell he loved those guys and their music by the way he played the piece.

James: For me it's a vehicle of transcendence: I love it when I'm no longer there. If I'm really into a show, the "thinking Jim" no longer exists. That's the energy of playing guitar, the energy of God, the energy of love, and I love seeing that in other people. When I see Carl shredding a solo, I see that all the troubles and worries that Carl has on a day-to-day level are gone, and he's somewhere else. Everybody's probably listened to Neil Young, and he's the primary living example of that. When you see Neil Young crushing a guitar, it's like the world is going to end, and nothing else exists. Nothing else matters. When I watch people play, that's what I look for, no matter what they're playing.

YOUTUBE IT

My Morning Jacket's Carl Broemel creates swirling riffs with his GFI S-10 pedal steel while Jim James rocks his trusty ES-335 on "Big Decisions" the first single from The Waterfall.

YouTube search term: My Morning Jacket "Big Decisions" Ellen

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Dialing in Your Gear for Great Sound

BY PETER THORN

All hail the great Malcolm Young, one of my personal "tonal barometers" for great guitar sound.

Someone recently posted one of my pedal demos in a thread on a guitar forum and stated that he really liked the sound of the pedal in the demo. Another forum member chimed in and said that for some reason, *everything* I play through usually sounds good. Shortly after, forum member "Squank" replied, "It's a talent. Most gear can be dialed in to sound at least decent."

I agree with Squank, and I appreciate the compliment! We live in a golden age of guitar gear and I'm in the lucky position of getting to play through quite a bit of it. It's rare that I come across an amp, pedal, or other piece of guitar hardware I truly dislike, and I can usually get a decent, useable tone out of most modern equipment. This month, I'll share some of my thoughts on dialing in great tone on amps, pedals, and guitars.

Guitars. Having all your guitars set up properly is an obvious essential for dialing in good tone. I like low-ish action, and for low action to work, I need to set my guitar necks to have *just* a bit of relief so the strings won't buzz and rattle, and in turn choke the tone. I'm always checking the neck relief on my guitars and adjusting the truss rod accordingly.

Pickup adjustments are also very important, and I set the height of my pickups by ear. I typically like the bass side of each pickup to be a bit lower than the treble side, so the wound strings don't overpower the treble strings. Also, strings generate more energy and volume in the area closer to the neck, so I typically set neck pickups lower than bridge pickups.

It's best to perform pickup adjustments while playing through a clean amp. You can more accurately hear the true tone and volume of each pickup when the signal isn't being compressed or overdriven by a cranked amp or pedal. Listen to the tone of each pickup position, and try to balance the height of each pickup until the volume remains relatively the same when changing pickup settings.

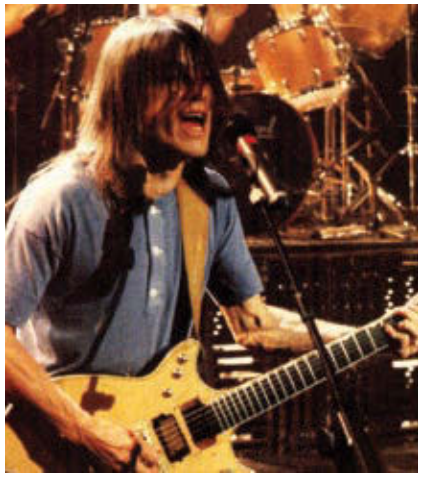
Amps. When I first plug into an unfamiliar amp, I'll start by setting all the tone controls to noon, and slowly raise the volume to a comfortable level. If the amp has a master volume, I set it for a good listening level and sweep the gain knob to explore the amp's overdrive capabilities. I then make small tone tweaks by sweeping each pot up and down and listen to the range they work in, and how they affect the sound from different points in front of the amp.

If an amp has a bright switch—and you decide to use it—be sure to check how your overdrive, fuzz, and distortion controls interact with it when engaged. A bright switch can make many drive pedals sound like a swarm of bees. Tip: Rolling the tone or treble dial *way* down on your overdrives and distortions can really help in this scenario.

Some amps have a bright cap on the volume pot. The purpose of this cap is to allow your amp to provide a bright, clear tone at lower settings on the volume pot. The more the pot is increased, the less effect the cap has. When the pot is turned all the way up, it *should* be completely out of the circuit. Like they do with a bright switch, drive pedals can interact with a bright cap and result in less-than-pleasant drive tones. If your amp has a bright cap and you don't like the way it responds to some pedals, or you find it excessively edgy at low volumes, consider having a competent amp tech change the bright-cap value or remove it altogether. This can be a worthwhile and easily reversible mod.

Speaking of overdrive and distortion, I come from the *slightly* less-is-more school. I recently heard Eddie Van Halen say he likes to crank things until they're ready to explode, and then backs them down just a hair. I dig that way of thinking, and it applies whether you get your distortion from a pedal, a cranked NMV (non-master-volume) amp, or an amp with a more modern preamp-gain circuit.

Excessive distortion homogenizes guitar tone. You want enough gain to get great



sustain and an aggressive sound if desired, but you don't want to lose the punch, dynamics, and immediacy of a semi-dirty tone. Malcolm Young is my benchmark—a perfect sonic barometer to go by when talking about incredible rock-guitar tone. His playing proves you don't need a ton of distortion to rock with *total* authority.

Pedals. I have a basic rule when it comes to overdrives, distortions, and fuzzes: When I engage them, I want the volume to either stay the same or increase a bit, so I'm "pushing" the amp with the pedal. Because drives compress the sound, they can tend to seem louder overall when you turn them on, but actually they might be *reducing* the overall peak level. I don't want to diminish the natural output level coming out of my guitar, and I don't want my guitar tone to vanish in the mix when I hit a pedal. As I mentioned earlier, I often run the tone control quite low on drive pedals, which I feel keeps them sounding warm and natural.

Above all, have fun, and remember: Even though I've *implied* there are rules, there really are no rules.

PETER THORN
is an L.A.-based guitarist who has toured with Chris Cornell, Melissa Etheridge, Tsuyoshi Nagabuchi, and many others. He released a solo album, Guitar Nerd, *in 2011. Read more at peterthorn.com.*

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FOH - Erykah Badu.

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Alone at Last

Sonic adventurer and Bowie collaborator David Torn happily dissects his first album of solo-guitar material, a genre-defying, fuzz- and reverb-soaked mix of free-form expression—but don't call it "experimental"!

BY JASON SHADRICK

David Torn is always in motion. If he's not doing session work for artists as diverse as David Bowie, k.d. lang, Madonna, or film composer Howard Shore (of *Lord of the Rings* fame), he's producing sessions for someone like saxophonist Tim Berne or Kaki King, mixing a big-band album, recording video-game tracks, writing large-form orchestral pieces, or composing his own film scores. Somewhere in there, he also finds time to offer feedback to his favorite amp and pedal makers. "I also have a duet project in the works, but I can't talk about it yet," he laughs, "mostly because the other person doesn't know about it."

Fortunately for fans of adventurous, genre-defying guitar music, Torn also recently released *Only Sky*—his first ever solo-guitar album. But don't think it's some acoustic strum fest just because it's nothing but guitar. Sure, the echo-laden electric tones of "Spoke with Folks" bask in simple structure and melody, but it wouldn't be Torn without some stuttering weirdness thrown in here and there. In fact, more than anything, *Sky* is full of cinematically quirky soundscapes that longtime fans are bound to relish. "So Much What" is like a soundtrack to a troubling, surreal dream that ends with the reassuring dawn of a new day. Meanwhile, "Was a Cave, There…" finds Torn wielding his new gold-foil-equipped Ronin Mirari guitar like a glitchy, fuzzed-out theremin before descending into an atonal labyrinth of multitap-delay weirdness that would perfectly heighten tension in an opening scene from *The Descent*.

"*Only Sky* is easily the most personal album I've made," says the Amityville, New York, native. "It's real-time composition, but it's about relaxing into it, enjoying the flow of sound, letting the music happen in its own time—and being open to the unexpected." As Torn prepared for his first solo tour, he took time to discuss the musical meditations that fuel his creativity, balancing seemingly opposite musical careers, and his newfound love of fuzz pedals.

"I hate humbuckers, but I love these pickups," David Torn says of the Foilbuckers in his Ronin Mirari. "I've been swapping pickups my whole life, but with these it's been three years of 'Wow, I love these!'"

This is your first completely solo recording. What made you take the leap and commit to this approach?
I do these home recordings all the time and usually post them somewhere like the Gear Page or SoundCloud. The album grew out of the fact that a few people said I should do a solo album and let people hear what I've been doing in the background of other music for the last 35 or 40 years. When [ECM Records owner] Manfred Eicher first brought up the idea in 2005 or 2006 I was, like, "Yeah, I'll do that but I'm going to do like three other records first." I'm not the world's fastest study when it comes to making records, so I only made the one record [2007's *Prezens*]. This time around, I went "Okay. This is it. This is what I'm doing."

Was the music entirely improvised or did you have some sketches that you took into the sessions?
Three or four pieces on the record—"Spoke with Folks," "Reaching Barely, Sparely Fraught," and "Only Sky," and maybe "OK Shorty"—are improvised in very different ways than the rest of the record, and those were the ones that I did at home. The rest was much more free-form and exploratory. I recorded those at EMPAC [Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center] concert hall in Troy, New York.

How were those three or four pieces improvised differently?
I had this series going a couple of years ago, where I would get up and do this musical meditation. I just wanted to see how I felt in the morning. During the mornings when I would sit down for those solo pieces, I would talk to myself—like a crazy person. I'd say, "I want you to have an idea or a feeling and I want you to improvise as if it was a song. It doesn't have to be a song or precisely in song format but it needs sections and themes and I want it to be improvised." I would sit there quietly for two or three minutes and see what I felt. I didn't want it to be like a mental exercise, so I would spend about half a minute touching the guitar and playing

two or three chords, and then I would just play. I probably did about 40 days of that.

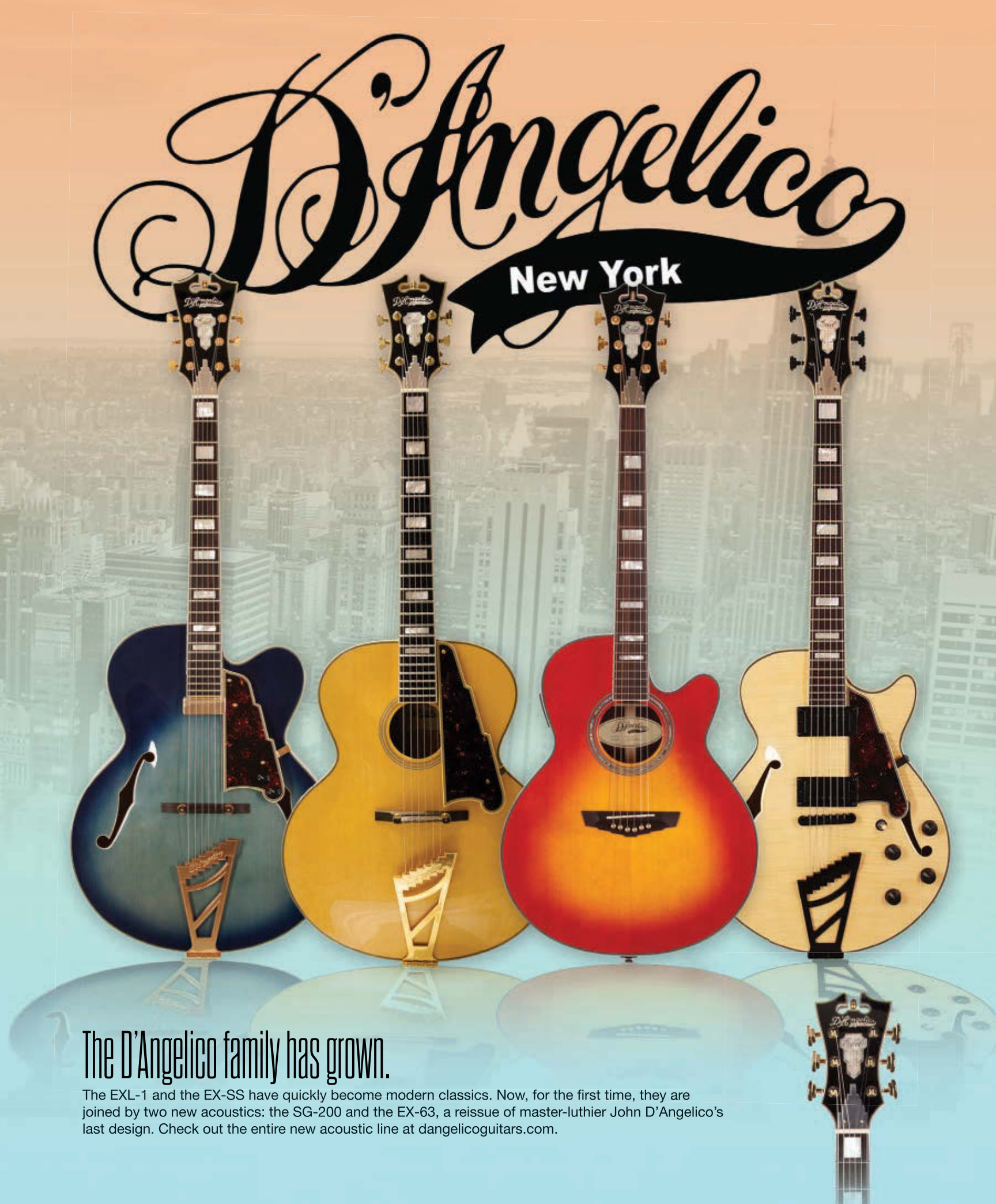
So they were kind of free-improv exercises?
"Free improvisation" has kind of developed this reputation as something that completely ignores the possibility of any kind of normalcy, any song form, any pentatonics, any major scales, any normal chords, anything that isn't noise. If you ask a guitar player about free improve, they think of a bunch of saxophone players going *wahhh*, and to them it doesn't make any sense at all. But if you're playing with people who are similar to you and love all kinds of music, the improvisation is very likely not going to end up being like that—it's not going to end up as one ostinato bass riff for 25 minutes. If you take into account a lot of different kinds of music and you've educated yourself to absorb those kinds of music, then you're going to end up with something that is neither one of those two extremes.

What elements of those "meditation" songs would you say are different from the rest of the album?
In those pieces I am barely looping. There are just a few small loops, and there's hardly any gear involved at all—just me, a Kemper Profiler, and occasionally a Hexe reVOLVER [glitch/stutter pedal]. I wanted to keep things super simple, but later I decided that it really wasn't enough. When I decided that I needed to record in a big hall, I thought I should just bring most of my live rig. Once I got in there I thought, "Forget about the song form. Just do what you do. Be free. Make noise. Explore the rhythm. Do what you feel like." I spent two or three days recording, and that's the bulk of the record.

Was everything recorded in one take, or did you go back afterward to overdub or tweak anything?
Everything was recorded in one take. There are a couple of little bits that were edited, but they are very small. In most cases, I would say that everything is a single take of *something*. There are two endings where I couldn't stop myself from overdubbing something while I was mixing. I just thought, "This needs something *else*." There are two endings that have acoustic guitar—one of them is with an EBow.

In a way, it must have brought you back to when you were a kid sitting in

Photo by Peter Gannushkin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Torn swaps out fuzz pedals often enough that he doesn't mount them to a board, but the heart of his live arsenal is his loop-creation rack. This iteration of the loop rig contains Lexicon PCM 80 and PCM 42 units, an Oberheim Echoplex Digital Pro, a modified Rane SM82S mixer, and voltage-control pedals for varying loop levels.

your room trying to figure out what to do with the guitar.

Yes, I still do that even when I'm actually working or writing. It's the same thing for me. I am sitting there concentrating. I just set up and fiddle around with ideas and practice.

What types of things do you practice?

I practice tone production every day of my life. About eight years ago I started to make sure I play every day. I just got to this place where I had to continually fine-tune the way I interact with the electric instrument with just an amplifier. So I split my practice time to "with stuff" and "without stuff." Today, I am actually going to practice with the Hexe reVOLVER because I got a new one that is quite different. I want to take it on the road because it does things that the other ones don't do. I need to kind of learn it.

You do quite a bit of film scoring and studio work. How do you balance that with your solo albums?

Guys used to say you can't be committed to more than one thing, and I've kind of struggled with that—because I want to make records. I want to make music that *I* want to make. In that world, I am definitely a slave to whatever the muse is, but the word "experimental" almost feels a little derogatory. I do follow the muse, but the muse doesn't always take me to *that* place. While everything might be an experiment, I am not a lab coat guy. I see my own music in a hundred different ways.

But I also really enjoy working with pop people. When you have the opportunity to work with people like David Bowie, Tori Amos, k.d. lang, John Legend, or Meshell Ndegeocello and bring something to the table that is a little bit different, it's awesome. I love it. On the other hand, I love improvisation. It has been a part of my life since I was a kid, in a real way, before any other music was. Then there is a side of me that used to be a songwriter. So I feel like I have to do that, and that is where my great love of stories kicked in. I have film scores that are very far from avant-garde. If you put *Only Sky* up against the score to *Lars and the Real Girl* you might think two different people wrote those. How many people do you know who have played with [trumpeter] Don Cherry and co-wrote a Madonna hit single?

Even before you started scoring films your music was often described as "cinematic" or "orchestral." How did you get into film work, and what inspired you to write for large-scale projects?

DAVID TORN'S GEAR

GUITARS

Ronin Mirari with Foilbuckers
Koll Tornado
Teuffel Niwa
D'Pergo Aged Vintage Classic
Godin MultiOud

AMPS

Fryette Aether
Fryette Sig:X
Fryette Two/Fifty/Two
Kemper Profiler
Bob Burt custom 2x12
with Celestion Blue speakers
Fryette Deliverance 2x12
with Fryette P50E speakers

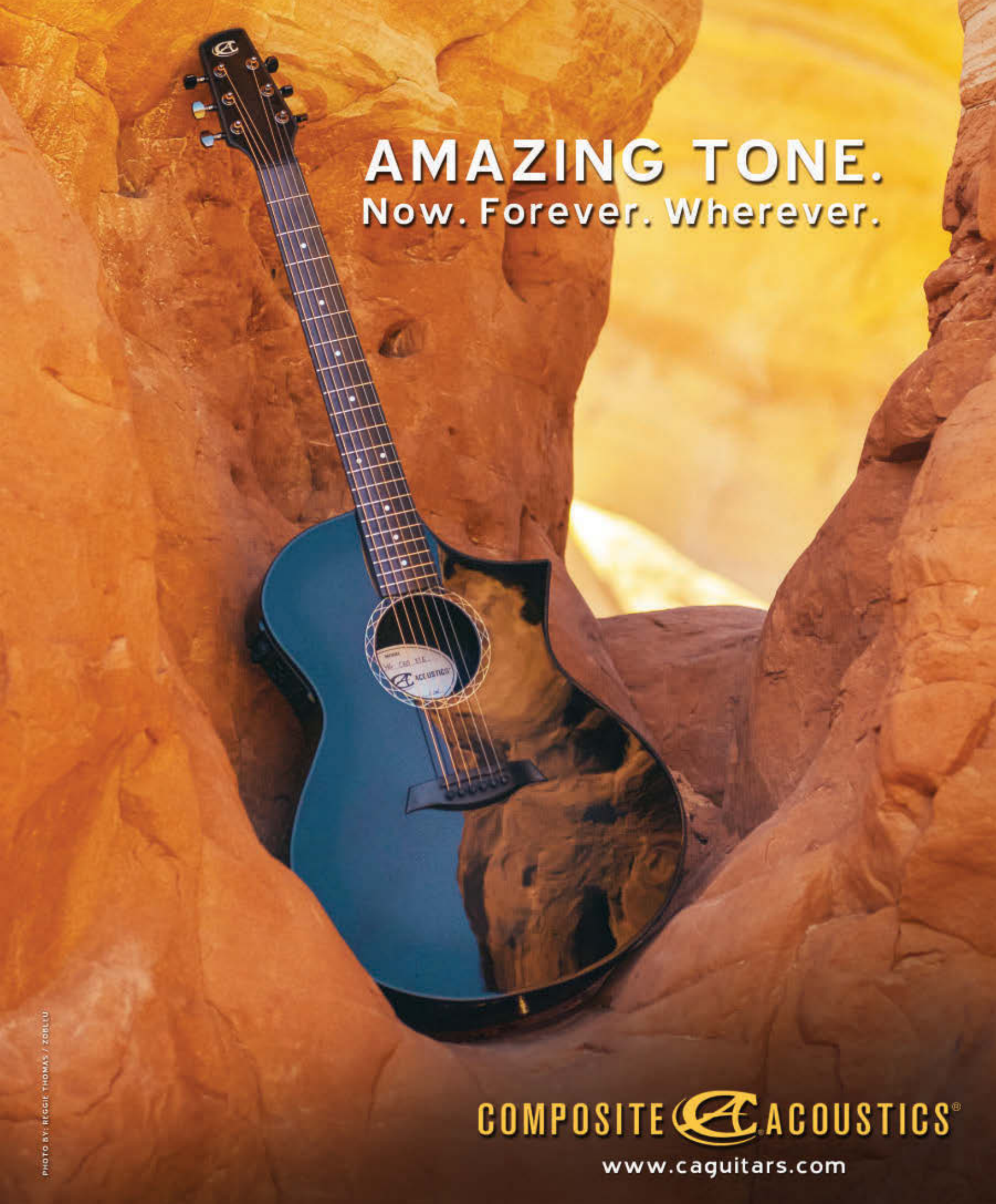
EFFECTS

Paul Trombetta Designs Tornita
Paul Trombetta Designs Mini-Bone
Fryette Valvulator I
Catalinbread Antichthon
Hexe reVOLVER I
Hexe reVOLVER DT
Two Lexicon PCM 42s
(one modified by Gary Hall)
Neunaber Stereo Wet Reverb
DigiTech Whammy DT
Empress Compressor
TC Electronic Classic TC XII Phaser
Goodrich LDR-2 volume pedal
Caroline Guitar Company Kilobyte
Oberheim Echoplex Digital Pro
w/ Aurisis Loop IV upgrade
Lexicon PCM80

STRINGS, PICKS, & ACCESSORIES

Snake Oil Vintage Formula strings
(.011–.048)
Agate pick (used occasionally since 1979, but mostly "just my little fat fingers")
Rane SM82S Stereo Line Mixer (modified)
Mogami cables
Roland EV-5 expression pedals

Photo by Scott Friedlander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From my perspective it was an accident. In the late '80s I had started *Cloud About Mercury* and invited Mark Isham to be in my band because he was the only trumpet player that I knew who understood the concept of how loops might be used in a musical context that wasn't just like playing over the loop. It was involved. It was contextualized. Little did I know, he was just getting his sea legs as a film composer. He said to me, "Dude, honestly, you belong in Hollywood. I want you to come to Hollywood with me and work on a few films. Let's see how this goes." We sort of became really close to being partners for a couple of years, and then that broke up and I came back to New York and that stuff didn't really go away. Eventually, people like Howard Shore and Carter Burwell [*The Big Lebowski*] were calling me. Then [Steven] Soderbergh's *Traffic* came up. I didn't realize how big my role was going to be in it, because I was in New York and the score was being recorded in Los Angeles. At the time, I thought I was just part of the session and that there was going to be an orchestra. I didn't realize until I actually saw the film that I *was* the score.

How has guitar technology inspired you recently?

I pay attention a little bit to what other people are doing, but not that much anymore. I do like to speak with amplifier designers and a lot of pedal builders, but more and more I'm back to talking about looping devices—because that is a huge part of what you hear on *Only Sky*. I'm just creating these loops and manipulating them in real time—sometimes without hearing them first.

What's your favorite looper?

My regular looping rig is a modified Lexicon PCM 42—the first one made of its kind. [Lexicon designer] Gary Hall modified it around 1981 to have approximately 20 seconds of sampling/delay time. The originals only had five seconds. I have another PCM 42 that was modded to feature a reverse-play switch. I also have an Oberheim Echoplex Digital Pro, which doesn't get as much use as it used to, and for a while now there's been a single Hexe reVOLVER going into my regular pedalboard, not my wet rig. Now, I have two Hexe reVOLVERs and they do very different things. One is an original revolver, and the other is called the reVOLVER DT, which was fed by my ideas. I don't think the DT will ever be a product, though—I think Piotr [Zapart, of Hexe Guitar Electronics] feels it's just too difficult to do. [*Laughs*.] There's always one extra looping device that I never talk about because I only use it on studio sessions. Lately, I've only used it with David Bowie.

What's the studio-only looper?

The looper I never bring on the road—because it requires a keyboard to control it—is the Electrix Repeater. I didn't use it on *Only Sky* because I knew I wouldn't be using it on tour. Each loop can be composed of four separately addressable tracks. And the multi-track loop can change pitch, time, or both simultaneously, in real time. Also, there's full-tilt loop storage and recall.

Except for the Hexe, all those loopers are quite old.

I've been on this rant for a year on why looping devices suck. Why are looping devices from 25 years ago way better than they are now? The modern ones are so technologically behind the beat, it's unbelievable.

What are your main beefs with modern loopers?

I have well-known beefs not with modern loopers, but with the folks who design and bring them to market. The major manufacturers of looping devices have created some really great things, but have ignored most of the more musically creative possibilities—which were established 20 to 30 years ago! And those possibilities have not even remotely been exhausted. I could go on and on, but in a nutshell my beefs are that new loopers are glorified, ridiculously un-ergonomic playback devices with little or no ability to alter feedback, oscillation, pitch, or time—and there's no sequencing or randomization, either. And even the best new loopers have very limited undo, real-time editing, storage, recall, and mixing capabilities. While I absolutely appreciate that these things are being made at all, most of the current hardware loopers are incapable of competing with older technologies with regard to musical potential—which is a damned shame! That said, there are definitely a few intriguing builders and designers now afoot with the promise of positive developments.

What's so unusual about the reVOLVER DT?

It's simply a rebuilt reVOLVER II with two little sidecar pedals that offer instant changes to each of the pedal's eight modes, with controls over both range and rate of change. It also lets me change between modes with simple foot taps.

How do loopers affect your amplification needs?

I always play in a minimum of stereo. Most of the time I only use two amps. One is dry and the other has the big reverbs and most of the looping. I have been using Fryette amps since around 2004. I have a lot of them and I love them all. I've also got a mixer with pre-fader sends, which is critical. Everything on the effected track is capable of feeding everything else, and I can change sends and returns in real time. Everything—every loop, every reverb, every send, and every return—has to be manipulatable in real time with as small a footprint as possible. I end up with quite a few voltage-control pedals on the floor.

What non-looping pedals are you using?

The pedalboard is usually pretty simple [see gear sidebar for details] except for the fuzz boxes, which always change. One fuzz that's a constant is the PTD Tornita, a feedback fuzz that Paul Trombetta made for me. My fuzz thing went crazy this year—I just went nuts. I decided I actually needed to learn about it, so I started figuring out why they are all so different. I've got an insane collection of fuzz boxes. For this upcoming tour, I think I'm taking the Tornita, a Catalinbread Antichthon, and at least one Basic Audio fuzz, probably the Fuzz Mutant.

What is it that makes the Tornita so indispensable?

It sounds and feels burry and amazing. When the feedback is tuned and engaged, its feedback loop is quite controllable, melodically speaking, via the big knob and the guitar's volume control.

What are some of the craziest or rarest fuzzes in your collection?

Oh! There are a few prototype pedals made by Paul Trombetta. I have a very rare Black Daddy pedal made for me by Sean Michaels of Lovepedal. There's a lightly modified Marquis Enso made by Tim Cooper of Faceless FX, and—somewhere—an 8-Ball pedal made by Matt Wells. Some older, rare Skreddy fuzzes are great. I have a custom FuzzTool from GuitarSystems, and two amazing pedals made by Animal Factory Amplification out of Mumbai, India.

Let's talk guitars. Lately you've been playing a Ronin Mirari.

I've had a fantastic time ever since I got that guitar, and it's partially responsible for my interest in fuzz because the pickups are just so great. It's hard to imagine that you can be as old as I am and finally go, "Oh my god, I fucking *love* these pickups!" It was the first time in my life I could actually look at a pair of pickups, play them, and not focus on some weird tweaky thing that's wrong. There are parts of this guitar that I don't even like, but I can't stop playing it because it sounds so good and feels great. The humbuckers are splittable, and the fundamental idea for the pickup came from the '67 DeArmond "gold foils." When I was working on David Bowie's [2013] record, *The Next Day*, which was quite a few years ago—way earlier than you'd think [based on the release date]—I met the guys at Ronin. They were making these Hagstrom-type guitars out of old-growth redwood, and they had original gold foils in them. The DeArmond gold foils changed it all for me—especially when I played them in a guitar that was made well.

What's so remarkable about the gold foils?

I'm in the studio more than onstage, and I have a lot of digital equipment. When I'm working on films, monitors surround me and the induction in the room is horrific. So Ronin came up with a design that essentially turns them into humbuckers. I hate humbuckers, but I *love* these pickups—I actually like them better as humbuckers than I do as single-coils. They are so woody and stringy, without being overtly bright. They have all kinds of grit when it comes to breaking up an amp. They do great with fuzz and amp distortion. Mine are completely unpotted and directly mounted into the body like the old gold foils were. I find it so odd: I've been swapping pickups my whole life, but with these it's been three years of "Wow, I love these!" I don't care about the squealing—I can deal with it.

It's part of the charm.

It is part of the challenge anyway, right? It's like feedback, except more horrible.

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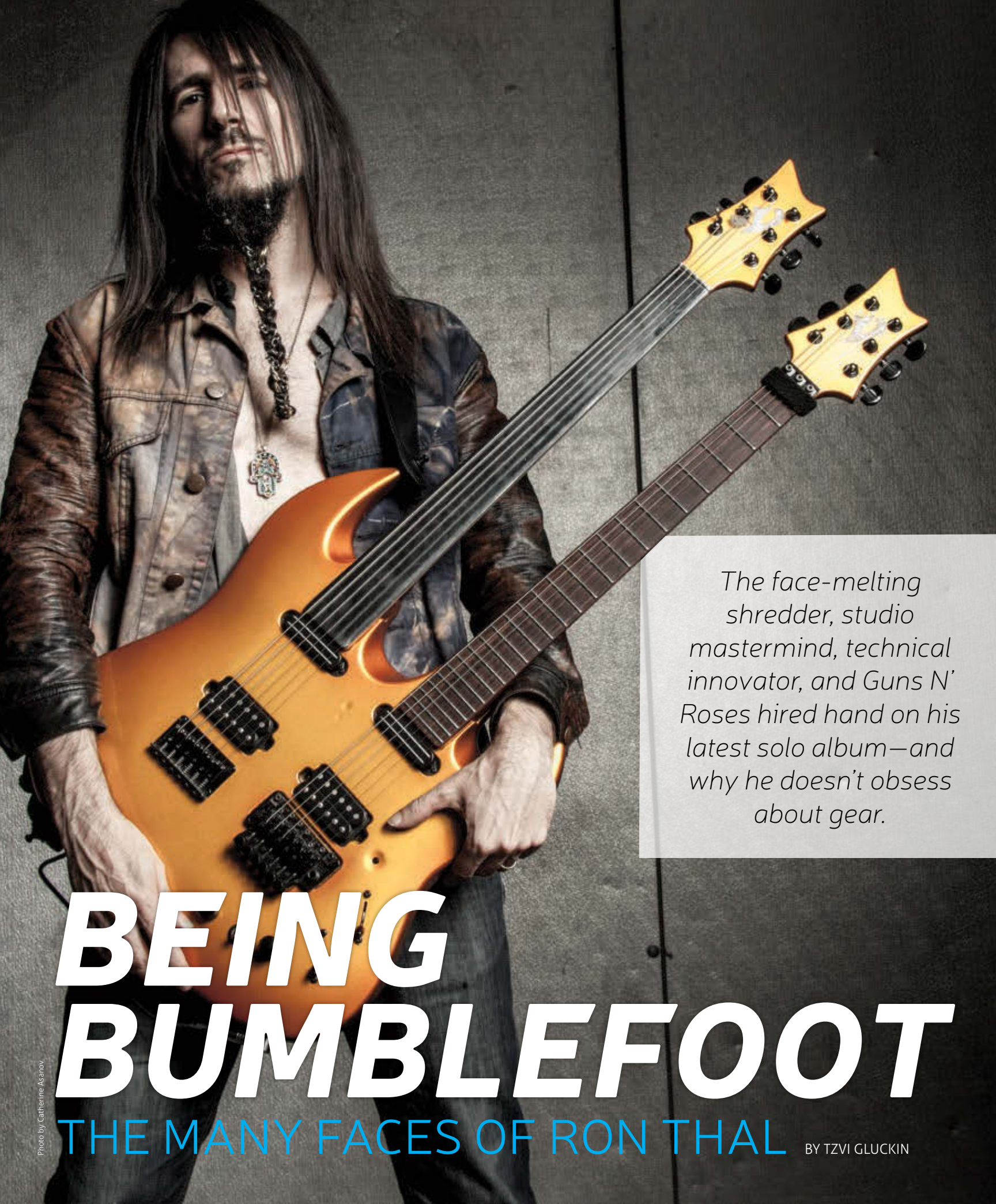

Photo by Catherine Asanov

The face-melting shredder, studio mastermind, technical innovator, and Guns N' Roses hired hand on his latest solo album—and why he doesn't obsess about gear.

BEING BUMBLEFOOT

THE MANY FACES OF RON THAL

BY TZVI GLUCKIN

Ron "Bumblefoot" Thal melting frets on an S-style Vigier.

Bumblefoot (aka Ron Thal) is a monster guitarist. His astounding chops, incredible ears, and innovative techniques are the stuff of legend. He's also an accomplished singer, songwriter, teacher, transcriber, engineer, and producer. He's as comfortable onstage as in the studio, and has been producing and recording music for as long as he's been playing (since age 6).

Thal's first break came in 1989, when he was featured in *Guitar Player's* new talent column. He made more waves with his 1995 release, *The Adventures of Bumblefoot*, and built a cult following with subsequent albums and tours. But the cat was fully out of the bag in 2006, when Thal joined Guns N' Roses, replacing outgoing shred master Buckethead. He subsequently toured the world, playing its biggest stages. Thal's stellar guitar work is all over GNR's 2008 release, *Chinese Democracy*, and the band's live DVD, *Appetite for Democracy 3D*. He's also worked with Jessica Simpson, Lita Ford, Guthrie Govan, and many other artists.

Thal is a fun interview subject. His custom doubleneck Vigier Double Bfoot was on his lap throughout our conversation. He demonstrated techniques, illustrated points, and played examples mid-sentence, displaying his command of contrapuntal fingerstyle classical, jazz chord melody, and of course, classic rock. He ripped through the Yngwie solos he learned note-for-note as a teenager. "I can't believe I still remember this," he said after playing—perfectly—an obscure gem from the first Alcatrazz album.

When Thal isn't touring or recording, he teaches, hosts workshops, raises money for charity, and hypes his line of incendiary hot sauces. His latest album, *Little Brother Is Watching*, was released in February and he is—you guessed it—touring like a madman in support.

PG sat down with Thal to discuss his new album, influences, unorthodox guitar techniques, production work, guitars, and amps—and why being gear-obsessed isn't always a good thing.

Photo by Frank White

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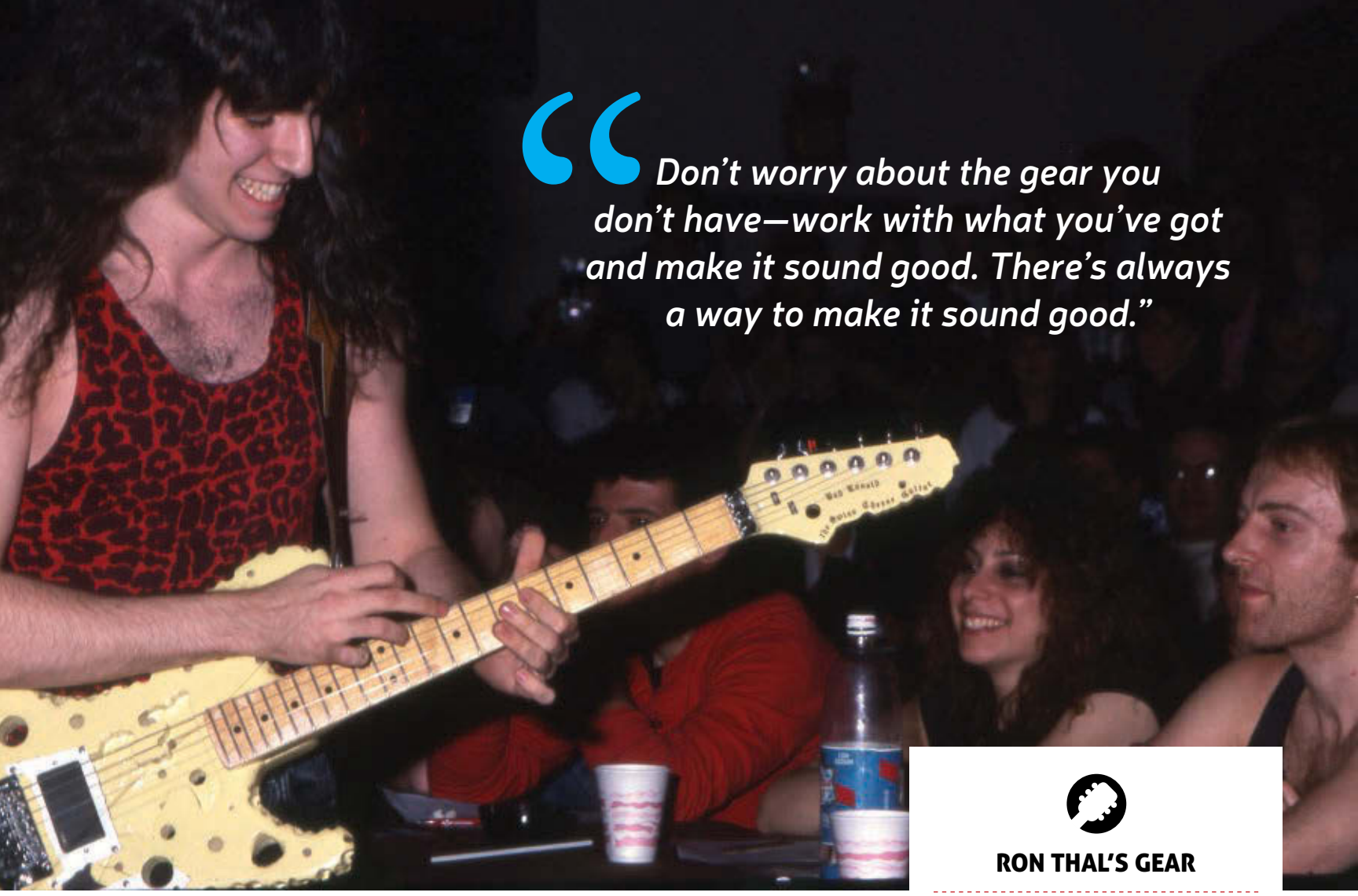

> *"Don't worry about the gear you don't have—work with what you've got and make it sound good. There's always a way to make it sound good."*

Bumblefoot at a guitar contest held at the Birch Hill Nite Club in Old Bridge, New Jersey, in 1989. He won the contest playing his homemade "Swiss Cheese" guitar, later reproduced by Vigier.

Some songs on your new album make it obvious that you're a Beatles fan.
Oh yeah. My first musical loves were the Beatles and Kiss. Hearing Kiss' *Alive* when I was five is what made me want to get out and do this. But as far as just really loving music, that was the Beatles. All five of them. I include George Martin, the producer, because he added everything that made those songs special.

How did they influence you?
As time goes on I realize more and more that music is about telling stories—sharing your overall feeling, the picture you envision, and trying to bring listeners into that experience so you're there together. It comes from the words, the melody, the intensity, the dynamics—everything! It's all the ingredients combined, every spice in there.

And Kiss was more about being a rock 'n' roller?
Yeah. They were more about getting onstage and letting your energy out.

Who was your man in Kiss? Ace? Gene?
The great thing about bands like Kiss and the Beatles is that you know them on a first-name basis. Each name is so important to the entirety of it. If one of them wasn't there, it just wouldn't be what it was.

You've said that Eddie Van Halen gave you permission to do things. What did you mean?
That's when I started chopping up guitars, pulling off frets, and getting into other things. Before that, I always thought guitar was just a tool for getting a song out there. But when I heard the things he was doing, I realized that this instrument can do so

RON THAL'S GEAR

GUITARS
Vigier Double Bfoot fretted/fretless doubleneck (with DiMarzio Chopper and Tone Zone pickups)
Vigier G.V. Rock
Vigier custom "Swiss Cheese" (recreation)
Vigier custom "Flying Foot" (recreation)

AMPS
Engl Invader 100
(through a Marshall 4x12 cab)

EFFECTS
TC Electronic Nova System
Dunlop Cry Baby wah

STRINGS & PICKS
D'Addario NYXL
(gauged .009-.046 for the fretted neck and .012-.056 for the fretless neck)
Various .9 or 1.0 mm picks with a bit of surface texture

Photo by Frank White

much more, and can have a life of its own. That's when I started experimenting with what you can do with the string. You're not just playing the fretboard—you're playing the strings themselves. The string has sounds to offer beyond pressing it against the fret. I started really thinking about divisions of strings, harmonics, and what you can get out of that. For example, we're always shortening the length of the string toward the bridge, but you can also shorten the length of the string toward the nut and get all these other sounds. [*Plays an example, touching a metal thimble to the string above the bridge, shortening the string length and raising the pitches of the fretted notes.*]

It's like putting a capo on the wrong end of the string.
Yeah. Once you have that, you realize you can get a lot of extra fingerings.

Did you always use a thimble?
I've tried other things, such as a nine-volt battery and a rubber band, but I needed something I could immediately access, and having a thimble on my fingertip seemed like the most practical way to do that. So rather than touching the string against the fret, I'm touching the fret against the string. That's how I get everything else I need.

In your workshops you often encourage people to practice one thing while thinking about another. Why?
When your hands do something automatically, your brain is still telling them what to do. You're still there doing it—you're just not *overdoing* it. You have to practice letting it happen. Get used to not having to be on top of it. Otherwise, if something distracts you, you're going to fumble. You have to loosen the grip and trust yourself that you'll be okay. Everything that you want to do will happen without having to think about it.

So sitting in front of the television or having a guitar in your hand when you're on the phone is a good way to practice?
Absolutely. There will be times when you do need to focus. But it's definitely good to just let it happen while you're doing something else or thinking about other things. Get used to having that little background piece take care of it all.

Is it important to practice with a metronome?
The metronome is your friend. The metronome is never unimportant. Pros use metronomes. It's how you gain stability playing to something other than just yourself. Your drummer is your metronome, and your drummer is playing to a metronome. If not, then he's got a good internal one from all that practice he *did* do with a metronome. Guitar players need to use a metronome to keep from running amok. Guitarists

Bumblefoot won a New Jersey-based guitar contest in 1989. He's shown here with one of the judges, Def Leppard's Phil Collen, and his prize: a Les Paul guitar.

tend to get overly excited, like a wild puppy. We start running in front of the beat and pissing all over the room. We need to reel it in. Otherwise we just rush too damn much and then blame the drummer. [*Laughs*.]

Lots of people love fast playing. Are you drawn to fast music, or is "fast" just an expression of something deeper?
The thing about speed is, not everyone can do it. It's something you achieve over time, so it's something that's appreciated—it stands out. But speed can overshadow everything else that's going on in the music, so it's sometimes best to use it sparingly. It's a strong spice, and a little goes a long way. You've got to remember who you're making music for. Be conscious and considerate of your audience and what they want. If your audience is shred guitar players, then hell yeah, go crazy. It's like wearing the right outfit for the right occasion. But what the hell is speed, anyway? It's just another letter in your alphabet. Speed, chords, vibrato—they're all just parts of your playing.

Your recording skills seem as developed as your guitar playing. How did you learn your way around the studio?
I started when I was 6 years old. I had a cassette recorder in the corner of the room. We had a little nylon-string guitar. We figured out just how far back the drummer needed to be so that our levels would match. Once we'd recorded our music, we played it back facing another tape recorder and sang along—that's how we'd overdub vocals. I couldn't even play yet, but I was writing songs. Later we got a couple of microphones and a mixing board, and eventually a nice reel-to-reel Fostex 8-track, then an Alesis ADAT and a Tascam DA-88 synced to a PC running Cubase, and finally, just Cubase.

Do you have a room full of gear?
About 13 years ago I got a whole second house just for recording. I needed a place where I could truly live music and not have to watch the clock or worry about this and that. That's where I record my albums, produce, and do everything else.

YOUTUBE IT

Bumblefoot's solo segment onstage with Guns N' Roses. Don't miss the fretless thimble madness at2:22!
YouTube search term: Guns N Roses Bumblefoot Solo Chicago House of blues 2012 (Proshot)

Do you have racks of compressors and effects?
No, plug-ins. Nothing sounds as good as tape and real stuff, but the main piece of gear you need is your ears. As long as your choices and judgment are good, and you know how to get the most out of what you have, your ears are what matter. I've heard a lot of shit come out of amazing studios, and I've heard amazing things come out of bedrooms. Don't worry about the gear you don't have—work with what you've got and make it sound good. There's *always* a way to make it sound good.

Do you wear different hats for producing and playing?
When you're performing you can't think like a producer. You definitely need to

Photo by Frank White

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Bumblefoot (seen here with MIke Orlando) wreaks microtonal mayhem on the fretless half of his signature Vigier doubleneck during a USO benefit in NYC in late April.

Photo by Annie Atlasman

shift gears, and over time you get better at doing that. You need to spill your guts, and then be the listener who asks, "Is this translating properly? Are we capturing it? What do we need to do differently?" Wearing the producer hat is like the producer telling the musician what to do—except it's all you.

How do you coax great performances from other players?
It depends on the person. You have to know the person you're working with. For example, some people want tough love. They want you to say, "No, that fucking sucks. Do it again. You're better than this." Other people want, "That was really nice, but why don't we try it this way, just as a backup?" The goal is to get their best. It's not always a comfortable process getting people to dig deep and fight through frustration, keeping it productive and positive with the goal of capturing the best moment.

Is your main guitar the Vigier Double Bfoot?
Yeah. This one in particular is only about two years old. Man, I have beaten the crap out of it. It's so full of dents and torn paint and cracks and missing shaved-down wood chunks and loose screws—and I *love* it. It's got mileage. I know where every dent is.

What's it made out of?
Wood. [*Laughs.*] I am so bad with that! If I had to guess, I'd say it's probably maple or alder. The fretted fingerboard is probably rosewood, and the fretless fingerboard is "I-metal"—it's some sort of anti-metal. [*According to Vigier, the guitar's body is mahogany.*]

And it doesn't have tone controls.
No. Both necks have a volume knob and the 5-way pickup selector. [*The positions are bridge humbucker, bridge single-coil, both pickups, both pickups out of phase, and neck alone.*] It has a switch to choose between necks, a place to hold the thimble, and—just to be silly—a kill switch. I needed it for some of the *Chinese Democracy* stuff, but otherwise I don't really use it. I'm a liver, not a killer!

The pickups are DiMarzios?
Yes, on both necks—a DiMarzio Tone Zone and a Chopper, a dual-railed humbucker. I love that pickup. It's expressive, and it reacts like a single-coil, but with the fullness of a humbucker.

If you break a string, do you just go to the other neck?
I haven't broken a string in years. I

change my strings maybe once every six months. I just don't break strings.

You didn't change your strings every night on tour with Guns N' Roses?
My tech would every two days or every two shows. I thought, "You're going through all those strings! We could do a whole tour on one set, and it would be fine."

What about amps?
For my own stuff I go out real simple. Whatever amp they have, I just plug in and play. If I have a bus or van or something with a trailer, I bring my Engl 100-watt Invader head and Marshall cabinet. But if I'm running across Europe doing a lot of workshops and things like that, I just use whatever they have. I think people are too dependent on gear, and they use it as a crutch. Of course, if you're playing certain metal things and need a lot of saturation and certain harmonics, you won't get that from a little clean Fender. But most of the time, it's just go out and play, and don't worry about nothing.

How did it feel stepping into a guitar chair previously occupied by Slash and Buckethead?
I just walked into it thinking, "I'm going to jam with a bunch of guys on a bunch of songs, and we're going to have some fun." As far as playing iconic songs, you want to be respectful of the audience and remember that those were the melodies they came to hear. I play them and don't try to rewrite the songs. But if there was an open area where I could jam, I'd just do my thing.

Did you play some of Slash's solos note for note?
Yeah. Certain things you can't even consider "solos"—they're more like a written part of the song that people know and sing along with, and you don't want to deprive them of that. Take "Sweet Child o' Mine": Everyone is waiting for those lines, and not playing them would piss them off. It would just be rude! However, if it's an open jam like the end of "Paradise City," that's your chance to do your thing.

Special thanks to PG readers Chris Annarumo and Yngve Grøvnik, who contributed several of these questions.

Putting Recently Outdated Guitars to Work

BY RICHARD JOHNSTON

Side-mounted electronics are yesterday's news, but the resulting soundport means a great, recently used guitar can be had for a song compared to an instrument without the void.

Now that the recession has faded and sales charts are showing upward curves, manufacturers of America's favorite instrument are in high gear. But making the same guitars they made a decade ago just won't do in an age when a 3-year-old laptop is the equivalent of a digital jalopy. Whether it's torrefaction of tone woods, the return to using animal-hide glue and thinner finishes, or the latest pickup system, the advertised message to consumers is clear: Everybody's new guitars are better than the ones they were making 15 years ago—or in 2013, for that matter.

All this focus on the latest new trends in acoustic guitars means there are some great bargains for those of you who want a good, clean, used guitar to play. To keep it simple, we're going to focus on guitars made after 1990.

Part of what works to the advantage of someone shopping for a used guitar is that while acoustic guitar fans revere instruments from the *distant* past, there's a persistent dismissal of guitars from more recent decades. Nobody necessarily speaks glowingly about the Gibson acoustics of the 1970s when the hot new technology of that era was the Ovation. But the guitar's revival—both in quality and production—that began in the late '80s resulted in increased competition among guitarmakers, and *all* manufacturers were upping their game by the '90s. Unless it's been exposed to climate abuse or rough handling, there's no reason to be afraid of a 20-year-old guitar that has decent action and frets.

It's important to observe a few rules on your bargain hunt for a recently used guitar so you can keep possible after-purchase costs to a minimum. Do not fall for the "it's been well broken-in, so it sounds great" explanation if you notice heavy pick wear and lots of nicks and dings. Such a guitar probably has worn frets and may have other issues related to less-than-careful treatment. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with guitars that show use, but why not add the character marks yourself? If your goal is a great guitar to *play*, you'll break it in quickly. An instrument that's been languishing in a closet or under the bed is a great find and far more likely to help you avoid costly trips to the repair shop.

Used guitar buyers often have a somewhat skewed understanding of what matters and what doesn't. Use this to your advantage. For instance, cracks that have been repaired well—especially tight, hairline cracks to the sides or back—have *zero* impact on a guitar's sound. (Even repaired top cracks are more of a cosmetic issue than a structural flaw that impacts tone.) Badly worn frets and bad neck angles, however, can wreak havoc with playability, resulting in high string-action that's very costly to repair. A guitar with a couple of tight, repaired-but-visible side cracks will often sell for far less than a similar crack-free instrument that needs a neck reset and new frets.

Discontinued models—or models where the manufacturer hasn't actually *dropped* the model but has ditched the earlier model code—are other potential bargains. For instance, Taylor ran two very similar lines of acoustics for a few years, one with the same 3-digit model code they'd been using for years, but another with a model code comprising letters and only one digit. These were pitched as *pure* acoustics to distinguish them from their acoustic/electrics with a "ce" or "e" designation. But a 700 Series Taylor dreadnought and a DN7 had similar woods and pricing. Sound confusing? Evidently, both Taylor and its dealers thought so too. The DN7 and other body shapes in the same series are now history, and many Taylor fans don't even recognize those models, which makes them harder to sell as used guitars.

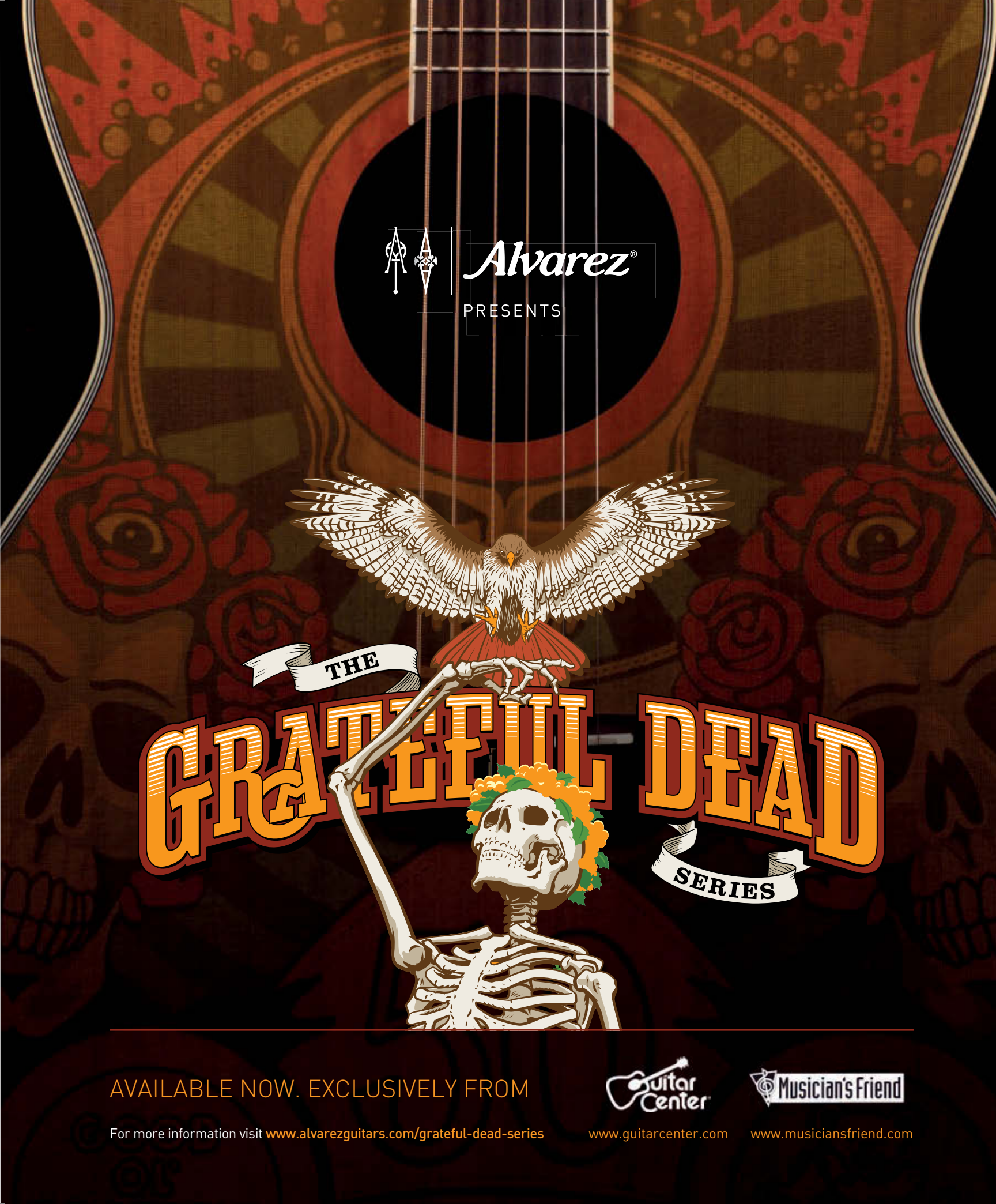
Changes in acoustic/electric pickup systems offer another opportunity to find great-sounding used guitars with what many buyers see as near-fatal flaws. When "active electronics" (requiring a battery inside the guitar) became the rage in the 1990s, new acoustics destined to be plugged in were under siege. It seemed most people didn't want to bother reaching inside the soundhole to change the 9V battery or deal with preamp boxes in their signal chain. If electric guitarists had tone and volume controls at their fingertips, why couldn't acoustic/electric players have the same convenience?

Fortunately, fear of compromising the acoustic tone kept manufacturers from putting a lot of hardware on soundboards, but rectangular control panels got mounted in the upper side instead. This allowed easy access to the battery, tone and volume controls, and later, even notch filters. When internal microphones became the latest gadget, those were added as well. *Lots* of fancy acoustic/electrics left the factory with a hole the size of a postcard in the upper side.

Today's pickup systems do far more with discreet controls that you barely even notice. And used guitars with the now-abandoned side-mount technology sell for far less than an equivalent model without it. Some people use those pickup systems and like them, but they can be removed if you don't. A set list of your greatest hits will cover the hole, as will a bumper sticker advertising your favorite band or political cause. Some people even *pay extra* for a soundport in the side of their guitar, so maybe you'll want to just leave the hole alone! Whatever you do, just be sure you save all the parts so your guitar can be returned to it's original state should you decide to sell it.

You can save a lot of dough if you do your homework, and shop while thinking of your next guitar as a tool for actually making music.

RICHARD JOHNSTON
co-founded Gryphon Stringed Instruments with Frank Ford in 1969. He later shifted from repairing vintage guitars to writing about them, and has contributed to dozens of magazines and several books, the most recent being Inventing the American Guitar. He appraises musical instruments for Antiques Road Show on PBS.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SECONDS OR PLEASURE

Dwight Yoakam celebrates reckless recording and the integrity of musical imperfection on his new solo album, Second Hand Heart.

WRITTEN BY EMILE MENASCHÉ
PHOTOS BY EMILY JOYCE

"This *allll* comes full circle." Dwight Yoakam was on a storyteller's roll too good to interrupt, and he knew it. But he also hadn't forgotten that he was answering a question about the high-energy sound of his new album. For 10 minutes, he riffed on Buck Owens, the evolution of country rock, and why he chose to self-produce after years of collaborating with legendary guitarist/producer Pete Anderson. Yet in the end, Yoakam brought it home, closing the circle by explaining what all of this had to do with his current touring and recording band, and how they brought sonic power to his new album, *Second Hand Heart.*

Actually, "full circle" is a good way to describe Yoakam, circa 2015. Long before the term "Americana" was in the musical lexicon, he was blending rootsy sounds that resonated with the traditionalists in cowboy boots while it won over a healthy chunk of rockers (or maybe it was the other way around). Nearly 30 years ago, the honky-tonk energy of his debut album *Guitars, Cadillacs, Etc., Etc.* brought lean muscle to a country music scene that was pudgy around the middle.

Now, after more than a decade on indie labels and major-label subsidiaries, he's back on Reprise. Yet in some ways, Yoakam falls as far outside the Nashville mainstream as he did back in the 1980s. In contrast to the Auto-Tuned, arena-rock sound that's been ruling the country charts, *Second Hand Heart* sounds pure, direct, and unvarnished. The songs, written mostly by Yoakam, are built on a classic country-rock foundation of twangy guitars, first-position chord progressions, and, of course, Yoakam's hillbilly-tinged vocals. But they're also full of enough little surprises to keep you guessing—and enough rocking riffs to make you want to grab an axe and play along.

On the phone from Los Angeles, Yoakam had the easygoing enthusiasm of the guy sitting on the next barstool, sometimes making his points by singing them. It's obvious that even after nine platinum albums, two Grammys, and countless other career milestones, the man from Pikeville, Kentucky, remains an ardent student of American roots music.

Yoakam's go-to electric is the Epiphone Casino Elitist—the Japanese-made copy that is modeled after the original Casinos from the mid '60s. Why? "Those P-90 pickups," he says.

If I didn't know better before hearing *Second Hand Heart*, I would have thought, that's a good band album. How did you get that sound?
You're hearing a sense of abandon. Starting with [2005's] *Blame the Vain*, I've used my live band for recording. And I kind of "cast"—for lack of a better term—the musicians that suit what I'm trying to do. I worked for many, many years, successfully and with great pride, with Pete Anderson. Then I decided to make a change. I'd left Warner Bros., I was kind of doing an indie thing. Pete and I did one indie album [2003's *Population Me*] and a few years went by before I began to do the next one [*Blame the Vain*] for New West. I was performing at that point with [lead guitarist] Keith Gattis. We did a little acoustic duo run together, back in early 2003. And that bled into the following year and then I said, "You know, I've got to go out and do dates that were booked this summer, and I need a band."

It's not common for solo country artists to use the same players on tour and in the studio.
That's the thing that was distinctive about Buck Owens' music when he exploded onto the scene. He took his live honky-tonk band into the studio. His touring band was his recording band. So that's why those records sound like that. And that's what I did on the first two albums.

Your guitar playing is an important part of that sound.
Believe me, I know my limitations. You're not going to see me out there sliding across the stage on my knees, flailing away at lead runs. I'm not a soloist, but I'm okay at my rhythm and riff thing.

What inspired you to play more electric?
Beck [Hansen] and I collaborated on "A Heart Like Mine," the first track I recorded for *3 Pears* [2012]. We were kicking around a couple of ideas in his home studio. I said, "I've got this thing, let's put it down." I played an electric rhythm track that I thought was a scratch—a guide for somebody like Keith Gattis. But Beck said, "We're going to do another track of that guitar. Look, you and I could each call five guys to come in and play this note-for-note, but Dwight, it wouldn't be *that*."

I knew what he meant: It was the intent. We ended up building the track out of my parts, and there's just a certain recklessness to it, because I'm an acoustic guitar player—basically a bluegrass player.

Pete Anderson used to call from the studio and say, "You've got to come in and play the acoustic." I'd say, "Well, maybe." On my records there'd sometimes be these fingerpicked parts that I wanted very beautifully articulated. Great studio guys would play this stuff. But for the most part, anything that was hillbilly or bluegrass, I had to play. Pete would just look at me and say, "You're going to do it."

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Dwight Yoakam credits Beck with inspiring him to play more electric guitar in the studio.

I don't fingerpick, I flatpick. When I play bluegrass, I use crosspicking, and I approach my songs the same way. It creates a different attack. I don't have that kind of beautiful, elegant virtuoso rolling like Pete does with his fingerpicking, but Beck made me believe that maybe what I did was halfway worthwhile.

What was your go-to electric guitar on *Second Hand Heart*?
My Epiphone Casino. It's an Elitist model—the Japanese-made copy that's true to the original Casinos from the mid '60s. I love that guitar, the sonic soul of it is all over this album, and was also all over *3 Pears*. Those P-90 pickups—hey, you know, if it's good enough for the Beatles on *Revolver* all the way through "Revolution," I guess it's good enough for me to trash around with. I use heavier strings on the electric. Years ago I started stringing up with jazz sets that include a wound G, but I'm still not in Stevie Ray Vaughan territory.

How did you approach tracking the guitars on this album?
I came back to [lead guitarist] Eugene Edwards, who's played with me now since the release of *3 Pears*. We went in as a unit and recorded as a band. I didn't overdub the countermelody stuff—I let them play it. That's what I think you're hearing—and I've come full circle now on that first question!

Can you share a memorable moment from those sessions?
On "Liar," I was showing the band the progression while we were getting mic sounds. I was in the iso room at Capitol Studio B singing, and the guys were out there live. I looked at [engineer] Marc DeSisto and said, "You know, you oughta record this anyway, just for kicks." He hit record, and that's the track. What you hear is the first time

DWIGHT YOAKAM'S GEAR

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ACOUSTIC STAGE AMP
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Crown XLS 1500 power amp
Peavey speaker cabinet

PEDALS
Morley ABC Selector/Combiner (amp switcher)

STRINGS & PICKS
D'Addario EJ21 Nickel Wound Jazz Light (.012–.052)
Martin Marquis 92/8 Phosphor Bronze (.013–.056)
Fender 351 medium picks (tortoise shell)

we played "Liar" as a band. I played electric rhythm guitar using that Casino through a Vox AC30. It's Eugene out there with the "Dwight Trash" Casino that Epiphone made for me.

The Dwight Trash Casino? Please explain.
I loved my Casino so much I had them build another version. I said, "I've got an idea. I want to monkey around a little bit. The [Gibson Firebird] reverso headstock ... can you put that on the Casino? I'd like to see how that looks."

So they made it for a couple of years. The headstock change altered the tone a little bit. I found that for my sound, the Elitist with the original headstock still had a little more of the brashness, the breakup. But this one was wildly great. I played it on *3 Pears*, but then I gave it to Eugene to use as the lead guitar on this album. He used it on "In Another World"—pretty much everything. There are only a couple moments of Tele lead. I think Brian Whelan played Tele on the lead for "Man of Constant Sorrow." Almost everything else is that Dwight Trash Casino doing the lead guitar part.

How did Chris Lord-Alge become co-producer?
He was going to mix the album and said, "I want to come by the studio and watch what you're doing in there, see how you're delivering this to me." I'd cut the song "Believe"—another guitar part with the Casino—and I was going to have Brian play Telecaster, but Chris interrupted. He said, "You just did it. We like what you just did. Just play it on the Tele." We ended up doing a second track like that. People think it's a 12-string, but it's actually two 6-string Telecasters. He took over the session, and that's how he ended up co-producing.

You've always had strong riffs in your songs.
With the Beatles, it wasn't just about the lyric and a melody, but their riffs. Whether it's "Ticket to Ride," "Day Tripper" [sings the guitar part]—hey, all the way to Neil Diamond writing "I'm a Believer" for the Monkeys. These songs all have killer opening riffs.

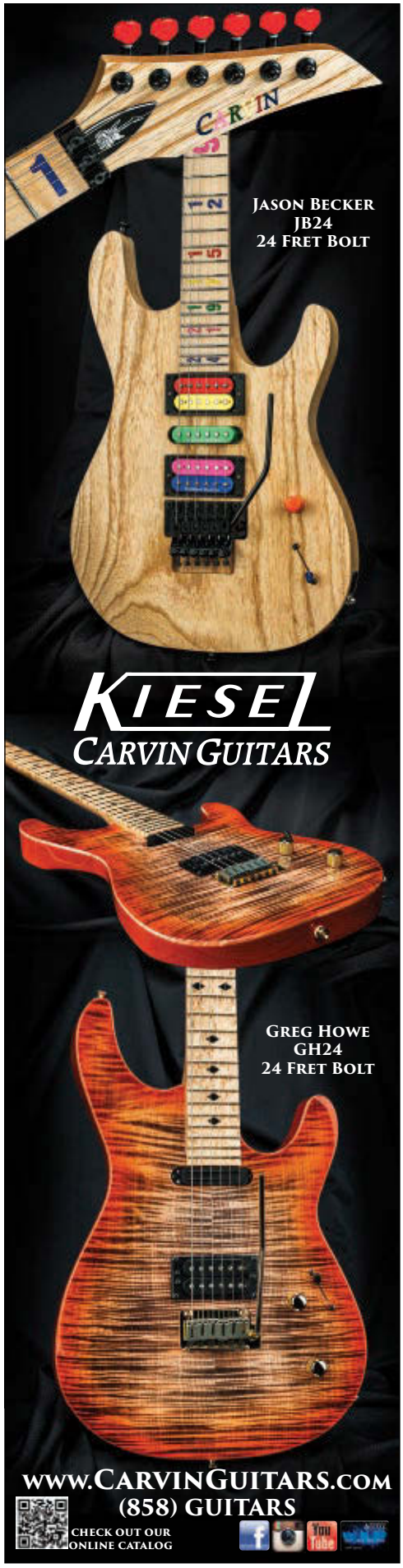
The riff is like the musical spiritual guide. When I'm ripping on the riffs, it takes me to the emotional place of the song. I think it's because I'm a singer. It's also coming out of organized music in some fashion, marching in school band and listening to swing, which has a lot of riffs. I don't read charts, but I was a drummer and there were always those kinds of parts in swing music.

> "The riff is like the musical spiritual guide. When I'm ripping on the riffs, it takes me to the emotional place of the song."

A lot of the songs on *Second Hand Heart* include acoustic, electric, and baritone guitars. What inspired you to use that instrumentation?
To me, it's about having an Appalachian foundation, hearing music in thirds, and hearing drones. And that comes from the Scottish, Welsh, and Irish music that, in America, evolved into commercial country music in the early 20th century ... the Carter family, the Everly Brothers. I'm talking about the border of Kentucky and Virginia, where I was born, Pikeville. It's just there in the DNA. You hear it in the Beatles interpreting the Everly Brothers with "Love Me Do"—those droning thirds. Certain instruments just work with the baritone guitar. I can be the counterpoint to the melody in a droning fashion, while simultaneously being percussive.

Describe your songwriting process.
"In Another World" began as a little riff on my J-200 that I first captured with my iPhone and then re-recorded in the studio. I finished it as a track first and later developed it into a full-fledged song. It's almost like being able to cowrite with myself.

Do you mean getting ideas down on tape or iPhone, and then coming back later to flesh them out?



Self-proclaimed hillbilly-bluegrass flatpicker Yoakam favors the acoustic guitar, and his weapon of choice is a Gibson J-200.

That's right. I began that process years ago when I was working on films in the late '90s and knew I couldn't set aside three months to just write songs. I was on a movie set, and I wouldn't have time to finish a song. I found that if I captured the inspiration when it happened, I could pick it up months later with a different mindset—like it was another person contributing. It allowed me time to germinate ideas and gain objectivity through this germination.

I'd teach the band the idea I'd written and build the song out from there. And after hearing them play, I'd say, "Let's do it differently, let me reshape that." The album *A Long Way Home* had a lot of that on it.

Do you work out the arrangements ahead of time?
I'm very spontaneous. I don't sit down and map it in any way, shape, or form. I kind of let the song lead me. I go, "let's play this" and I'll just start listening. If I have a bunch of guys who I've worked with enough onstage, who I trust to give me something that's representative of what I'm hearing in my head, I'll go with that.

Most modern Nashville records sound highly produced. This record sounds polished, but also organic and live. How did you accomplish that?
Just by using tubes and knobs. To me, that's where it really lives. It's what I hear; it's what I dig.

So no Auto-Tune or time correction?
To me, an effect like reverb or echo is intended to emulate something that occurs in nature when you sing in a glorious room or outside in an open area. Those systems that "correct everything" are *not* something of nature, so they affect the integrity of the music's imperfections. The integrity of the imperfections—god, I *want* that.

I like the honesty of breath, of air, so I wouldn't allow any compression. You can ask Chris. When we started mixing *3 Pears*, I said, "You're taking all my air away, man!" So when we started on *Second Hand Heart*, he just laughed and said, "More elbows and sharp, pointy edges, right?" And I told him, "Hell yeah, give me some hillbilly elbows and edges."

YOUTUBE IT

In this live version of "Dreams of Clay" from *Second Hand Heart*, Yoakam strums his trademark J-200 while Eugene Edwards riffs on the "Dwight Trash" Epiphone Casino.
YouTube search term: Dwight Yoakam Dreams of Clay Charlottesville, VA 4/25/15

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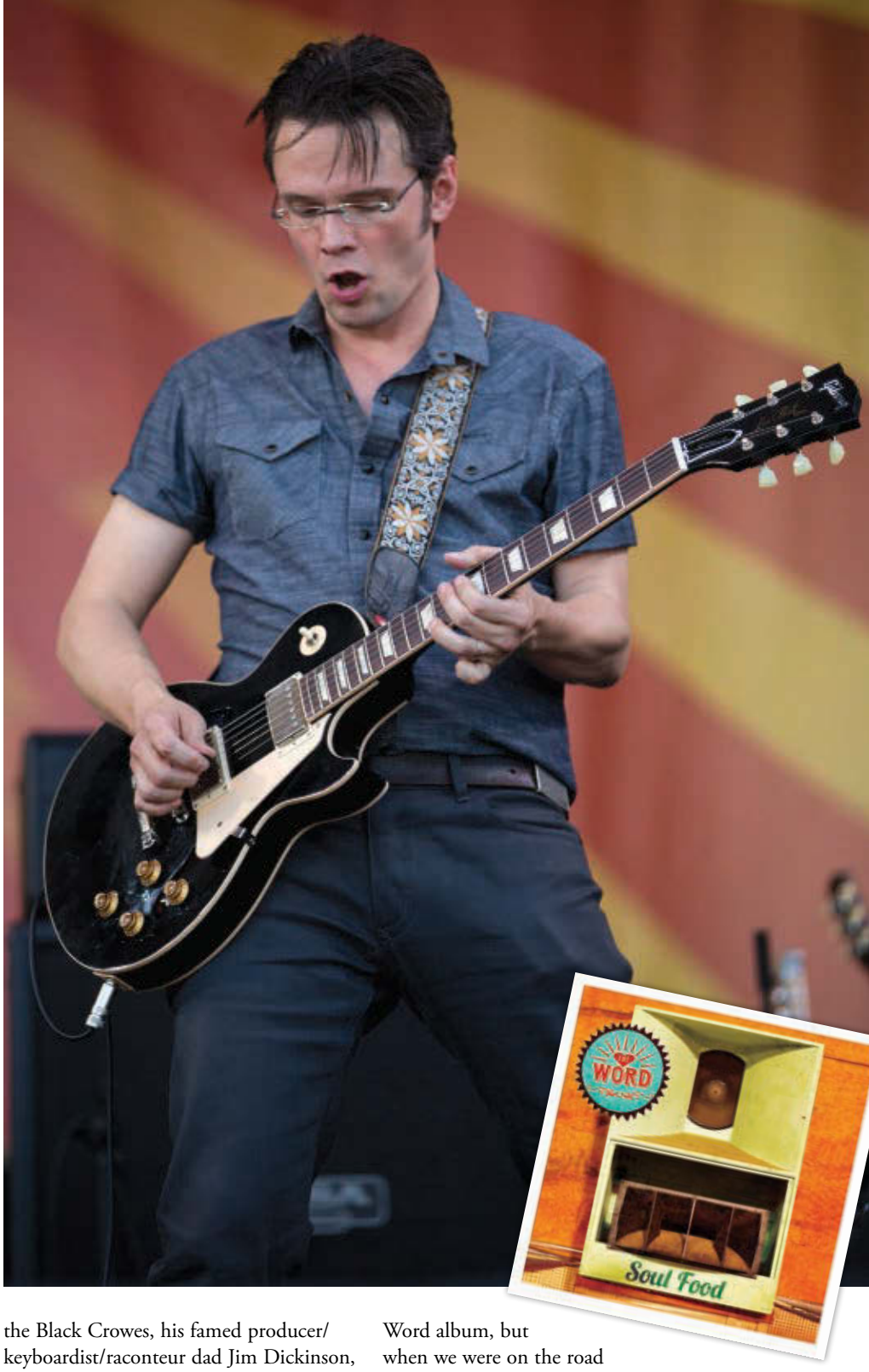
NEW WORD ORDER

Slide masters ***Robert Randolph*** *and* ***Luther Dickinson*** *discuss* Soul Food, *the Word's first release in 14 years.*

BY TED DROZDOWSKI

Photos by Douglas Mason



Here Luther Dickinson picks his Les Paul, but he's equally fluid playing fingerstyle.

Photo by Douglas Mason

If J. Robert Oppenheimer had explored gospel music instead of developing the atomic bomb, the results might have sounded like the Word: a wild, uncontainable explosion of musical ideas that careens from melody to melody with the velocity of a chain reaction.

On *Soul Food*—the group's first release since their 2001 debut, *The Word*—this quintet of roots music whiz kids crackles with energy. They spike traditional material like "When I See the Blood" with bold flourishes of giddy steel and a guest vocal from soul-folk singer Ruthie Foster, They slam the sinuous two-part title track with rhythmic curveballs from all directions. They romp through footnotes of jazz, funk, and field hollers with rare, rambunctious virtuosity on the 13-track disc, which was mostly free-formed at Memphis' famed Royal Studios (once home to producer Willie Mitchell and Hi Records) and in hipster NYC enclave Brooklyn Recording.

The Word's front line features two of the world's preeminent slide guitar players: Robert Randolph, a Bugs Bunny of pedal steel constantly up to all manner of sonic mischief, and North Mississippi All Stars guitarist Luther Dickinson, whose bloodline runs so deep in Southern soul, blues, and gospel that he's practically got red clay in his veins. Medeski Martin & Wood's keyboard killer, John Medeski, blows the outfit's creative mushroom cloud in further musical directions. And the group is moored—if that's the right term for a band as untethered as a junkyard Rottweiler working the night shift—by drummer Cody Dickinson and bassist Chris Chew, one of the most formidable rhythm teams in contemporary roots rock.

If Dickinson and Randolph weren't such amiable musical compadres, the Word's live shows and studio recordings could be Mayweather versus Pacquiao-like affairs. Instead, their creative relationship is more like Dali meets Disney: two artistic visionaries who share brave, raucous perspectives.

That *esprit de corps* attitude led Dickinson—who's also played with the Black Crowes, his famed producer/keyboardist/raconteur dad Jim Dickinson, John Hiatt, R.L. Burnside, the Wandering, Anders Osborne, the South Memphis String Band, Indigenous' Mato Nanji, and Los Lobos' David Hidalgo, *and* made two solo albums—to adopt a surprising modus operandi for *Soul Food*. "Slide's my thing, my favorite, but I don't think I played any slide on this album," he says. "I played a lot of slide on the first Word album, but when we were on the road Cody pulled me aside and said, 'Between you and Robert, there's just too much slide.' He was right. So this time I played a lot of rhythm guitar."

That gave free rein to Randolph, who built his estimable skills playing in the House of God church in what's known as the sacred steel tradition. But on *Soul Food*, Randolph tempers the wild streak

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Robert Randolph plays his Mullen G2 pedal steel at the 2015 New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival in early May.

that sometimes makes the six albums he's recorded with his own group, Robert Randolph and the Family Band, more about energy than substance. For every measure that Randolph whinnies freely (as on the thrumming chant "Come by Here"), he is equally tempered elsewhere.

Randolph's full-bodied 13-string Jackson custom pedal steel sounds especially wise and beautiful on "When I See the Blood," where he plays instrumental backing choir to Foster's lead vocal, and on his own composition "The Highest," where he crafts a shimmering dream world of gently overlapping melodies that float on the cumulous clouds billowing from Medeski's organ. Randolph's brand-new and unique pedal acoustic resonator guitar makes its debut on "Glory Glory," where he fuses the fieriest aspects of high-octane bluegrass, country, and gospel picking. The prototype of the triple-pedal, 6-string instrument Randolph's been developing with Nashville's Jackson Steel Guitar Company was ready just in time for the Royal sessions. "That was my first time playing it, right there in the studio," he relates. "They drove it straight to Royal. It's tuned to an open G major chord. I haven't used it live because it's the prototype. We have to make a couple of tweaks, and then it's coming right to the stage with me so we can do some acoustic tunes in concert."

Since *The Word* introduced their group 14 years ago, Randolph, Dickinson, and company have convened only for gigs. "We just played at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, and it was

YOUTUBE IT

Sometimes the Word's approach is like bebop, with a head played by the ensemble and hot potato solos tossed around. This tune, "Chocolate Cowboy" from Soul Food, gives John Medeski, Luther Dickinson, and Robert Randolph turns at the wheel. Dickinson splits the difference between jazz and country when his solo enters at the three-minute mark, and then Randolph drives it home starting at 3:57, pushing for melody and speed.

YouTube search term: The Word - 2/11/14 - Medeski, Randolph, Luther & Cody Dickinson, Chris Chew - Brooklyn Bowl

Photo by Douglas Mason

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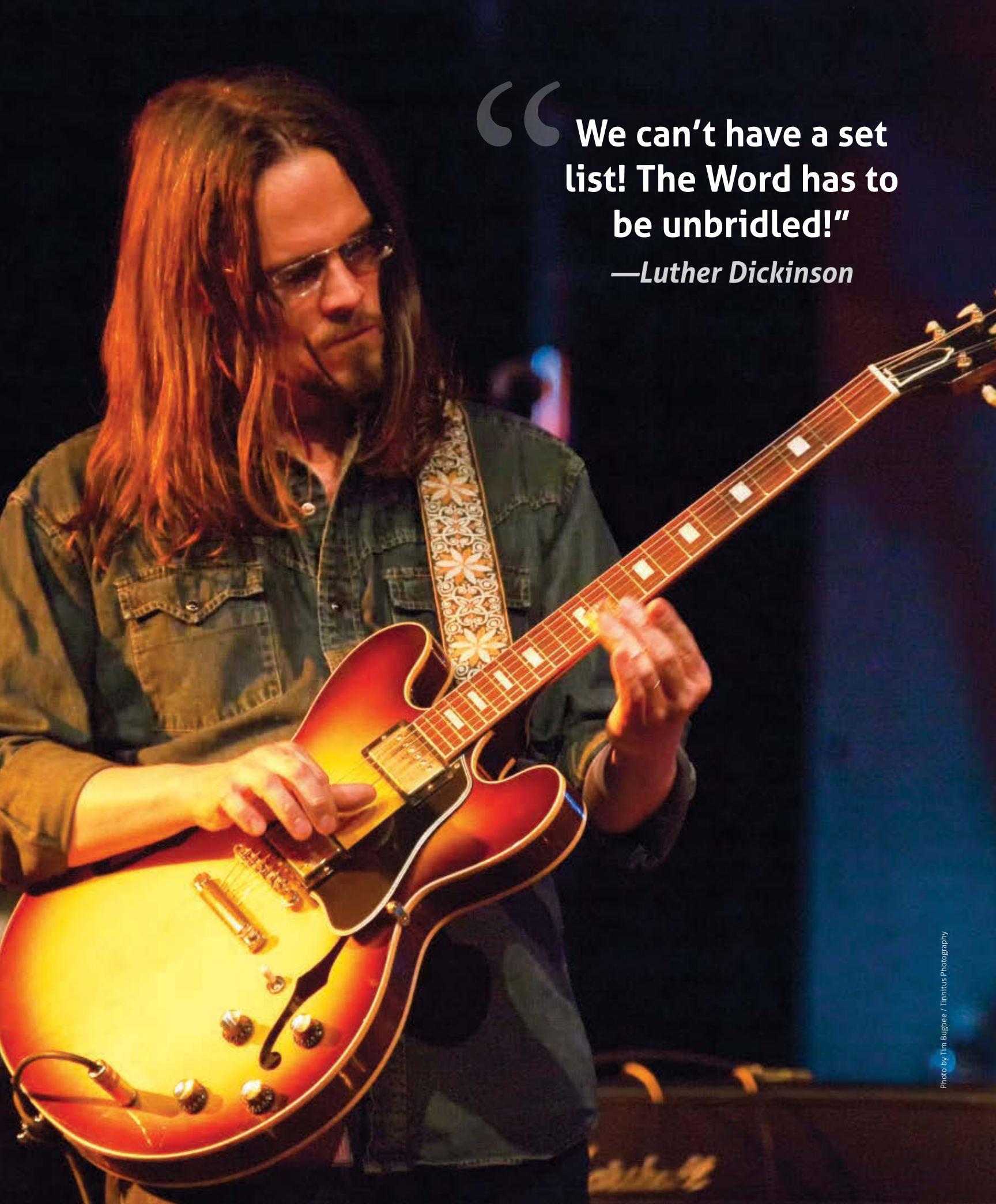
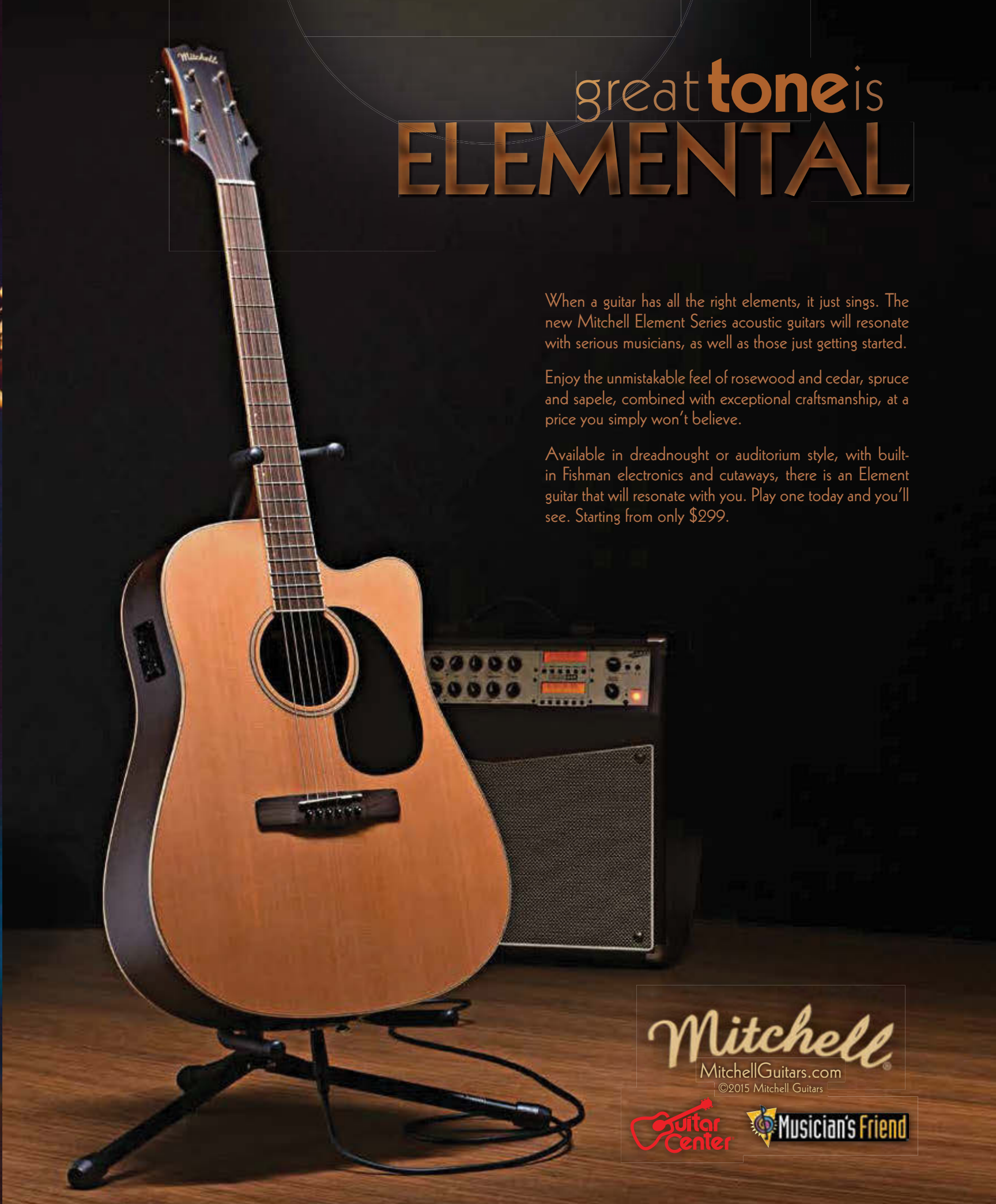


“We can’t have a set list! The Word has to be unbridled!”

—Luther Dickinson

Photo by Tim Bugbee / Tinnitus Photography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the worst show we ever did—a train wreck," Dickinson says. "We made a set list. We can't have a set list! The Word has to be unbridled! Otherwise it just gets confusing. The Word does its best when there is no agenda."

That may seem surprising, given the band members' abilities to plate-spin seemingly endless projects, collaborations, and tours. But it's also fitting, since the Word's ultimate line-up formed spontaneously.

"Cody, Chris, and me heard the first sacred steel compilation on Arhoolie [1997's *Sacred Steel: Traditional Sacred African-American Steel Guitar Music in Florida*] and were inspired," Dickinson recounts. "We were opening for Medeski Martin & Wood in 1998. We were listening to it and shooting the breeze with John, and we decided to make an instrumental gospel album together. Two years later we had the session scheduled, and just before we went into the studio the All Stars asked Robert to open up for us at the Wetlands in New York City. He was so amazing that we asked him to join us at the session."

The group quickly cut a broad path through the rock, jam, and roots worlds. Despite a long history of traditional African-American spiritual institutions frowning on secular intrusions upon their music (from Delta bluesman Son House being run from the pulpit to denunciations of Ray Charles for mixing blues and gospel on his breakthrough 1954 hit "I've Got a Woman"), Randolph has retained his status in the House of God denomination. He still plays in the church he grew up in when he's home in Irvington, New Jersey, and he looks forward to performing at the annual Southern Sacred Steel Convention this June in Nashville.

"I have no idea where the energy in my playing comes from, but it's definitely there," says Randolph, who, before he got the Asher lap steel he sometimes plays with a strap around his neck, was known to leap up and

Photo by Douglas Mason

ROBERT RANDOLPH'S GEAR

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> "I'm a sheer case of ADD. A lot of times for me it's a fine line between trying out something that jumps into my mind and going over the edge."
> —*Robert Randolph*

A Sacred Steel Primer

The first electric guitar, the National lap steel guitar known as the "Frying Pan," debuted in 1932. Right at that time, a revolution was taking place in the Pentecostal sect known as the Church of the Living God, the Pillar and Ground of Truth. The church divided after the death of its founder, and two splinter dominions, the Keith and the Jewell, adopted the new instrument as a cheaper, more practical alternative to the traditional church organ. And thus the sacred steel tradition was born.

Early proponents included J.R. Lockley and brothers Troman and Willie Eason. The tradition continues to this day, upheld by a line that includes the Rev. Aubrey Ghent (who conducts services in Nashville, home of the annual Southern Sacred Steel Conference), the Campbell Brothers, Calvin Cooke, Sonny Treadway, the Lee Boys, and, of course, Robert Randolph. All these artists have multiple albums, but the primer that introduced the style to the secular world (and inspired the Word) is the 1997 Arhoolie Records compilation *Sacred Steel: Traditional Sacred African-American Steel Guitar Music in Florida*, which includes music from both the Keith and Jewell dominions.

drag his pedal steel around the stage when moved by the music.

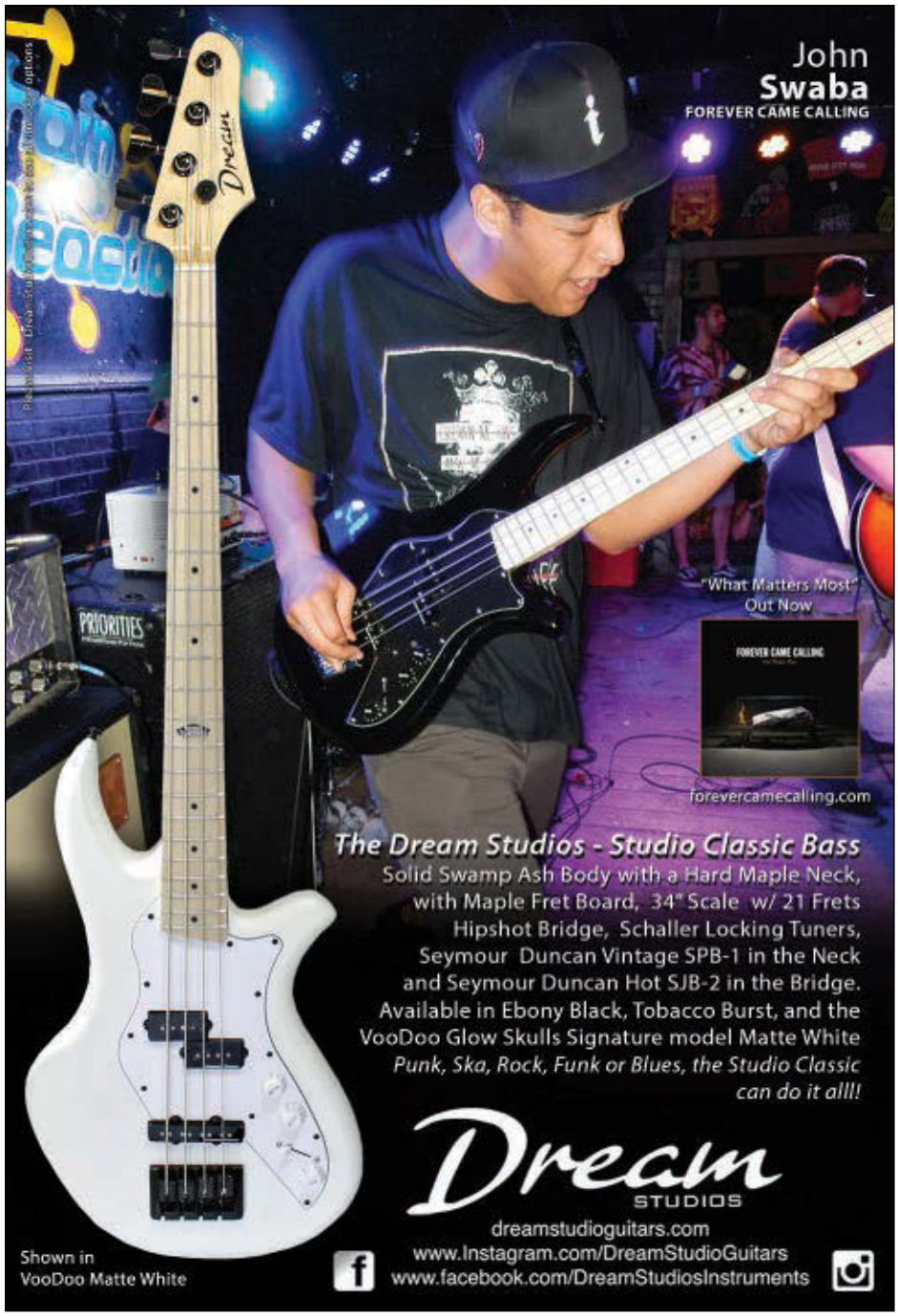
"I think I'm a sheer case of ADD," he continues. "A lot of times for me it's a fine line between trying out something that jumps into my mind and going over the edge. The guys in the Word are such great players that they inspire me to go both inside and outside the lines. But I learned improvisational playing in the church, so that's where it comes from for me. The preachers go into these long spontaneous passages. The singers start stretching out songs. People start to dance and shout, and we have to keep the music going behind them and try to reflect the rhythm and the spirit of what they're doing. It all comes from the heavens, so we have to be attuned. That really put me on the right level for playing with Luther, Cody, Chris, and John, who are such totally *bad* musicians."

Photo by Douglas Mason

"A force of nature" is how Dickinson describes Randolph. "I feel like we're all so fortunate to live in the age of Robert," he says. "He's taking the steel into new territory, but Robert still talks about playing a rhythm the way Willie Eason, Sonny Treadway, or the other pillars of sacred steel played it. Now there's a whole new generation of steel players coming up, and Robert's their only reference point. That blows his mind.

"Live, when Robert starts something we've never played—which he does a lot—we don't even know what key he's in, and that's when you break new territory. That's when you have that awkward moment of creativity that keeps you on your toes. Like Jack White, Robert has an inspiring ability to keep things creative onstage. He's also a great teacher and motivator. He wants that driving church rhythm happening on every instrument. He calls it 'strokes.' If you're slacking on the stroke, he's gonna look back at you, like, 'Give it to it!' He broke his hand and has been playing the last few gigs with a cast—playing with one finger and *still* smoking everybody. His melodies are so soulful, but infused with lightning."

Dickinson and Randolph are both ferocious pickers with intriguingly subjective styles. Randolph wears a thumbpick on his right hand and plucks with his other right-hand fingers (when they're not in a cast). Meanwhile, Dickinson follows the path of old-school blues guitarists, who did whatever they needed to get the job done. He uses a flatpick when necessary, but usually plucks with his bare right-hand fingers. On *Soul Food*, Dickinson plays in open D, open C, open G, and standard tuning dropped a step. Meanwhile, Randolph, inspired by an F-tuned



"Luther might actually know more gospel numbers than me. I learn new tunes from him all the time." —*Robert Randolph*

lap steel he found waiting at Royal, played it on *Soul Food*, along with his G-tuned pedal acoustic resonator and his 13-string pedal steel (in his current favorite tuning of F♯–D♯–G♯–E–D–B, G♯–E–E–B–G♯–E–C).

Dickinson is no lamb when it comes to gospel. "Luther might actually know more gospel numbers than me," Randolph enthuses. "I learn new tunes from him all the time."

Dickinson's grandmother played piano in a Baptist church, and his father relayed the old-school hymns that he heard coming of age in Arkansas, Chicago, and Memphis. Dickinson is also steeped in the repertoires of Fred McDowell, Son House, John Hurt, and Blind Willie Johnson, who had no compunctions about blending the spiritual and the secular. And at least one flavor in Dickinson's fat musical layer cake comes directly from his North Mississippi hill country mentors, bluesmen R.L. Burnside and Othar Turner. "It's really cool," he observes, "how Robert, John, and me bring together all of these overlapping angles."

Medeski brought a modernist perspective to *Soul Food*, according to Dickinson: "I did a mix, but it was too straight-ahead. John went in there and fixed the shit out of the album, creating arrangements by moving the tracks and really making it pop."

Dickinson says he seeks the same goal every time he plays: "It's not about the song, really, or about any one musician. It's about getting a group feeling with the other musicians *and* the audience. Like the Allman Brothers say, it's about 'hitting the note.'"

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Best Hand Forward

Focusing on the melody, British fingerstylist James Blackshaw hones his 6-string craft and sings on record for the first time.

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

British musician James Blackshaw is one of the brightest new voices to emerge in the fingerstyle solo guitar resurgence of the last decade. In 2003 he made his solo debut with *Apologia*, which he self-released on CD-R and sold at the record shop where he worked in London. Reissued digitally and on limited-edition vinyl last year, the album finds Blackshaw playing 6-string tributes to American Primitive guitarists John Fahey and Robbie Basho, as well as country-blues pioneers like Mississippi John Hurt and Reverend Gary Davis.

By the time he released his second album, 2004's *Celeste*, Blackshaw had picked up the 12-string guitar and begun to explore gradually unfurling, longer-form pieces with suggestions of raga and British liturgical music, a direction he'd follow on *Lost Prayers and Motionless Dances* (2004), *Sunshrine* (2005), *O True Believers* (2006), *The Cloud of Unknowing* (2007), and other solo albums.

After years of investigating the 12-string, Blackshaw began to focus on playing nylon-string guitar and piano, and composing small chamber works. This creative shift yielded *Love Is the Plan, the Plan Is Death* (2012) and his 2014 score for the silent French film, *Fantômas: Le Faux Magistrat*.

Containing a handful of smart pop songs, Blackshaw's latest album, *Summoning Suns*, is even more of a departure. It's the first time he's written lyrics, let alone sung them. But the album's instrumental selections show that Blackshaw hasn't totally abandoned the 12-string guitar and the evocative sounds he creates with it.

PG recently spoke to Blackshaw to learn more about the 34-year-old's creative odyssey and how singer-songwriters like Harry Nilsson and Warren Zevon figure into his musical evolution.

Blackshaw digs into one of his older Guild 12-strings, a GAD-G212. "I'm pretty surprised to see they've stopped making [this model]," he says.

Photo by Tim Bugbee / Tinnitus Photography

Describe your formative musical experiences.

My mum bought an upright piano when I was little and I used to love playing around with it. I couldn't really get the coordination between my left and right hands, so I'd usually end up just writing a simple melody line or trying to copy something I'd heard on TV or on the radio.

My parents used to listen to stuff like the Rolling Stones and Neil Young all the time, so I grew up listening to music like that too, and when I was 10 years old, I asked for an electric guitar for my birthday. I never had lessons and didn't even figure out how to tune it properly for a while, so even back then I was coming up with alternate tunings so I could just use one finger and play barre chords.

In my early teens, I heard Nirvana and that threw open all sorts of doors for me. I started getting into American indie rock bands, punk, hardcore and some pretty underground stuff. It was like connecting the dots—from one band I might find out about another band because they shared members or they'd done a split 7-inch together. Or I might decide to check out everything on a particular label like Touch and Go, Gravity, and Kill Rock Stars.

I played guitar in a couple of punk-rock bands but none of them really went anywhere—some shows, a demo or two. I even played piano and bass in a couple of more unusual bands when I lost interest in guitar for a little while, but at some point I realized I wasn't very good at playing with other people. I wasn't very reliable at that age and I also had pretty fixed ideas of what I wanted and didn't want to do.

I first heard John Fahey through a friend when I was 16 and was pretty much in awe of how one person can do that with just an acoustic guitar. I even went to see him play in London shortly before he died. But it wasn't until I was around 20 when I was working in a record shop and wasn't playing in any bands that I really started to listen to his records, and I became pretty obsessed.

Through Fahey I heard Robbie Basho and a lot of old country blues too, but I was also listening to a lot of '60s pop and psych, ethnic music, minimalism, and contemporary classical music. That time in particular, while I was working at the record shop in London, I was just listening to *so* much stuff. I bought a cheap guitar and began to teach myself fingerpicking, trying to incorporate all these different things I was hearing.

Other than players like Robbie Basho and John Fahey, which guitarists are your benchmarks?

I love Baden Powell—my favorite guitarist ever—Elliott Smith, Tom Verlaine, and Wilko Johnson.

Why does the 12-string guitar speak to you?

Twelve-strings can have this big, resonant sound that's rich in overtones. This initially lent itself very well to the kind of music I had in mind, accentuating the drone-like element when a lot of the

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James Blackshaw's long fingernails are 100 percent the real deal. "Yep, real nails. No acrylic jobs, unless I break one, which is pretty rare!" he says.

strings are played open. You can also tune the strings down really low and get this amazing bass sound. But lately, I have to say I like the clarity of the 6-string acoustic guitar more, where every note feels much more separated and less blurry, for lack of a better word.

Do you approach the 6-string guitar differently from the 12-string?
I find my fretting hand is much more active when I play 6-string guitar. As a result I think the melody tends to become more pronounced. Also, especially with the nylon-string, I think my playing becomes softer and a bit more spacious.

I find my fretting hand is much more active when I play 6-string guitar. As a result I think the melody tends to become more pronounced.

How does your work as a pianist influence your guitar playing?
I used to play 12-string a bit like playing the piano with the sustain pedal held down—lots of open strings, never really bending the strings—and using similar kinds of chord progressions and arpeggio patterns. But I feel like I've been trying to get away from that recently and appreciating the guitar more for the instrument it is.

Tell us about your compositional process and how it's evolved over the years.
I used to be very interested in long-form pieces, compositions that could last 10 minutes or more and were more about tone and texture. Because these pieces demanded a certain kind of patience and endurance—of both myself and the

Photo by Tim Bugbee / Tinnitus Photography

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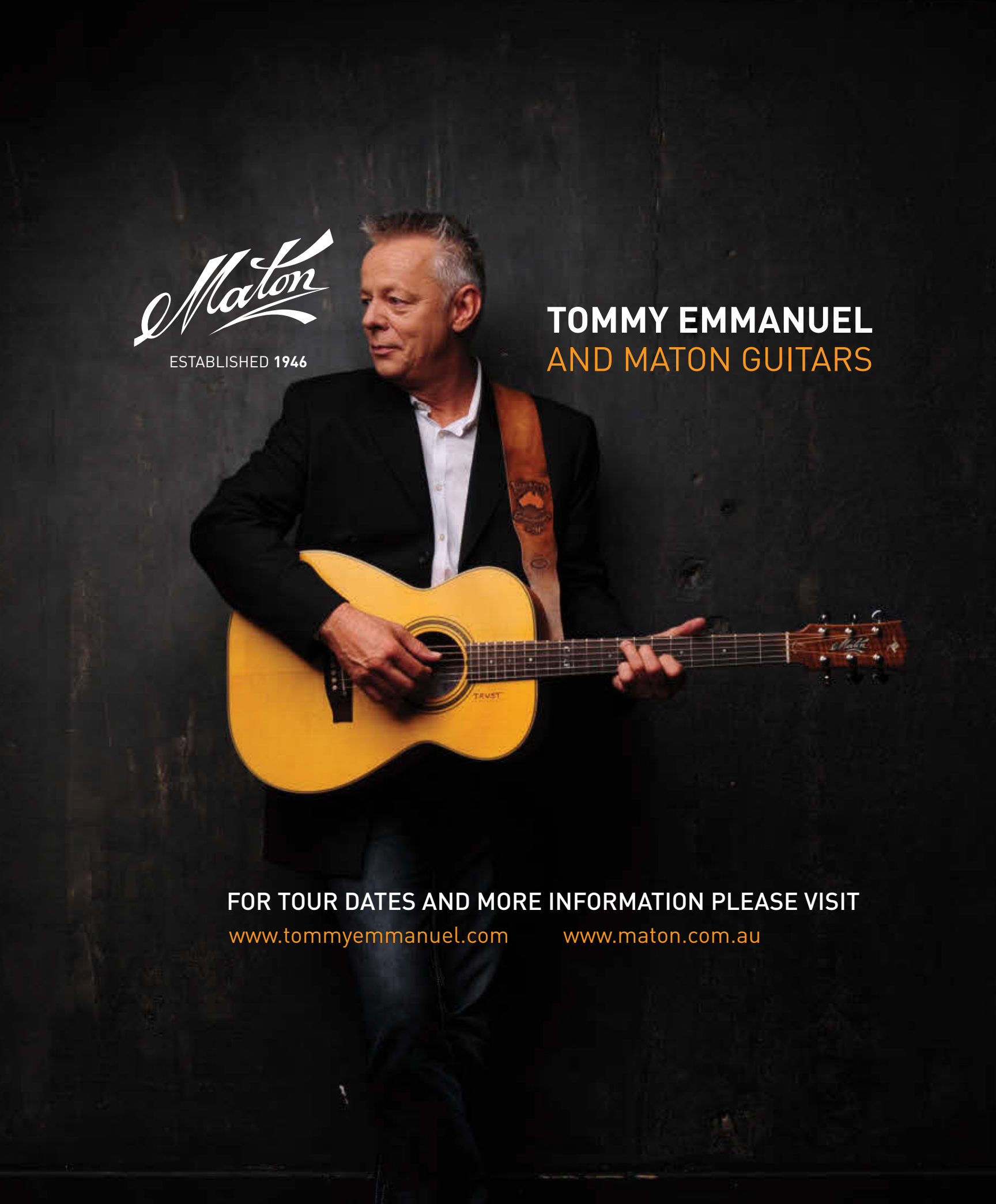
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Blackshaw's first instrument was piano. "I used to play 12-string a bit like playing the piano with the sustain pedal held down—lots of open strings, never really bending the strings—and using similar kinds of chord progressions and arpeggio patterns."

audience—they had an almost hypnotic quality. These days I feel more drawn to writing short pieces that are more melodically immediate—something you can connect with straight away.

Until now you've worked exclusively as an instrumentalist. What was it like to sing on *Summoning Suns*?

It was the most challenging thing I've done in a very long time and that's one of the reasons I wanted to do it. It's not like I've never sung before—I often have in the privacy of my own home over the years—but doing it on a record, doing it in public … terrifying! It's also quite difficult to write lyrics and work them into a vocal melody, not to mention singing and playing guitar at the same time. It's easy to underestimate how tricky that can be. I'm very proud of the results and now that I know I can do it, I'm less apprehensive and just excited to do more of the same.

The nonstandard tuning you used on "Nothing Ever After"—C–F–A♯–F–G–A♯—creates a haunting atmosphere. Do you work with a specific set of altered tunings or come up with new ones to suit the song or composition you hear in your head?

I've always experimented with different tunings. I'll just tune until I find something interesting, some kind of harmonic or melodic possibility I hadn't quite heard before, and then I'll start writing around that tuning. The tunings aren't totally random, I have some small amount of intuition about what will and

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won't work, but I usually have no idea about what I'm going to do when I first sit down to write.

The tune "Confetti" calls to mind the pop records of Jim O'Rourke. Do you count him as an influence?

Oh, definitely, and I'm flattered by the comparison. *Eureka* and *Insignificance*, in particular, are two of my favorite records, and I also love his work with Gastr del Sol, but it wasn't my intention to totally assimilate his music. There are a lot of other influences at play within that song. I was also thinking along the lines of Nilsson and the Jack Nitzsche singer-songwriter record, coupled with the kind of dark, sardonic tone of Warren Zevon. Judee Sill and The Millennium also spring to mind.

How did you come to work with Nilsson's daughter, Annie Nilsson, on the record?

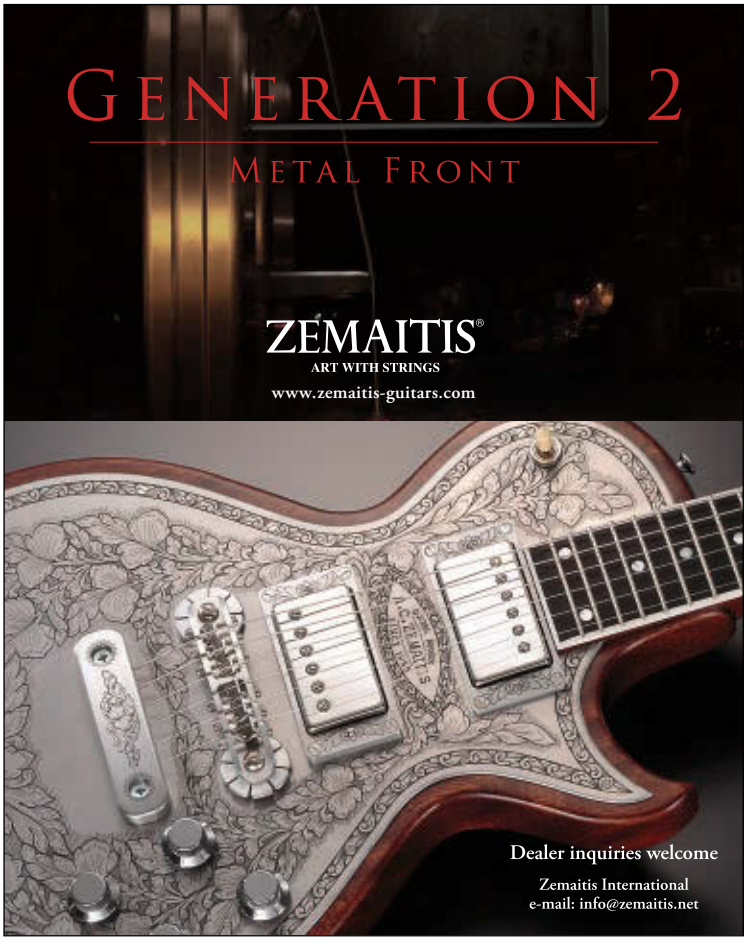
I'm a massive Nilsson fan and have been for many years. I've loved his music my whole life and still listen to his songs probably more than anybody else. I'm even working on covering a few Nilsson songs sometime in the near future. I used to post a lot more on Twitter and quite frequently posted videos of Nilsson, quoted lyrics, etcetera. I noticed Annie had "favorited" one of my tweets one day and I dropped her a line saying, "Hey, I love your dad!" and she wrote, "Me too!" We got chatting and I found out Annie and her husband, Jared, are fans of my music. We kept in touch infrequently for a few years. She's just a great person. When I started working on *Summoning Suns*, it seemed like the perfect opportunity to ask Annie if she'd like to sing on some songs, as I'd heard her cover of "Gotta Get Up," and I really love her voice.

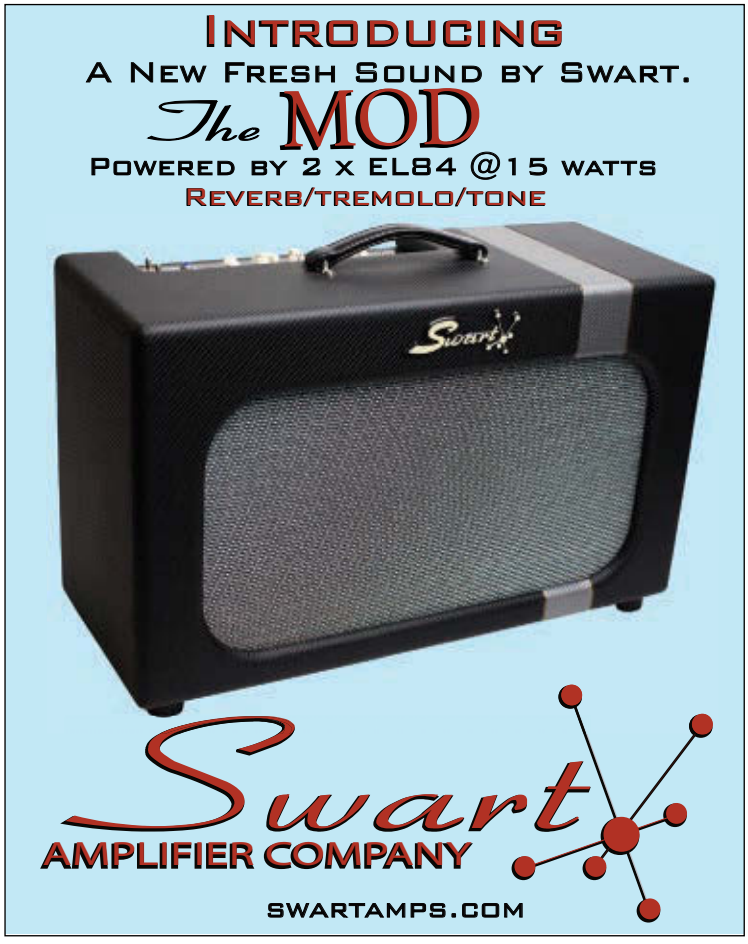
Did you write out all the arrangements or was it more of a collective thing?

I wrote the string and wind arrangements with help from my very talented friend Charlotte Glasson. I basically played all the individual parts on the piano for her, and she notated the parts and we figured out together what was and wasn't working. The piano, pedal steel, banjo, additional percussion—that was all the work of the members of Mori Wa Ikiteiru, a brilliant Japanese band. I gave them free rein to do what they wanted once all the other parts were recorded.

Quite a sophisticated sense of harmony is apparent throughout the record—and your work in general. How did you develop this?

I'm not sure! I think maybe because I knew from the beginning that I wasn't writing solely for acoustic guitar, and I just left more space for all kinds of harmonic possibilities to work their way into my music.





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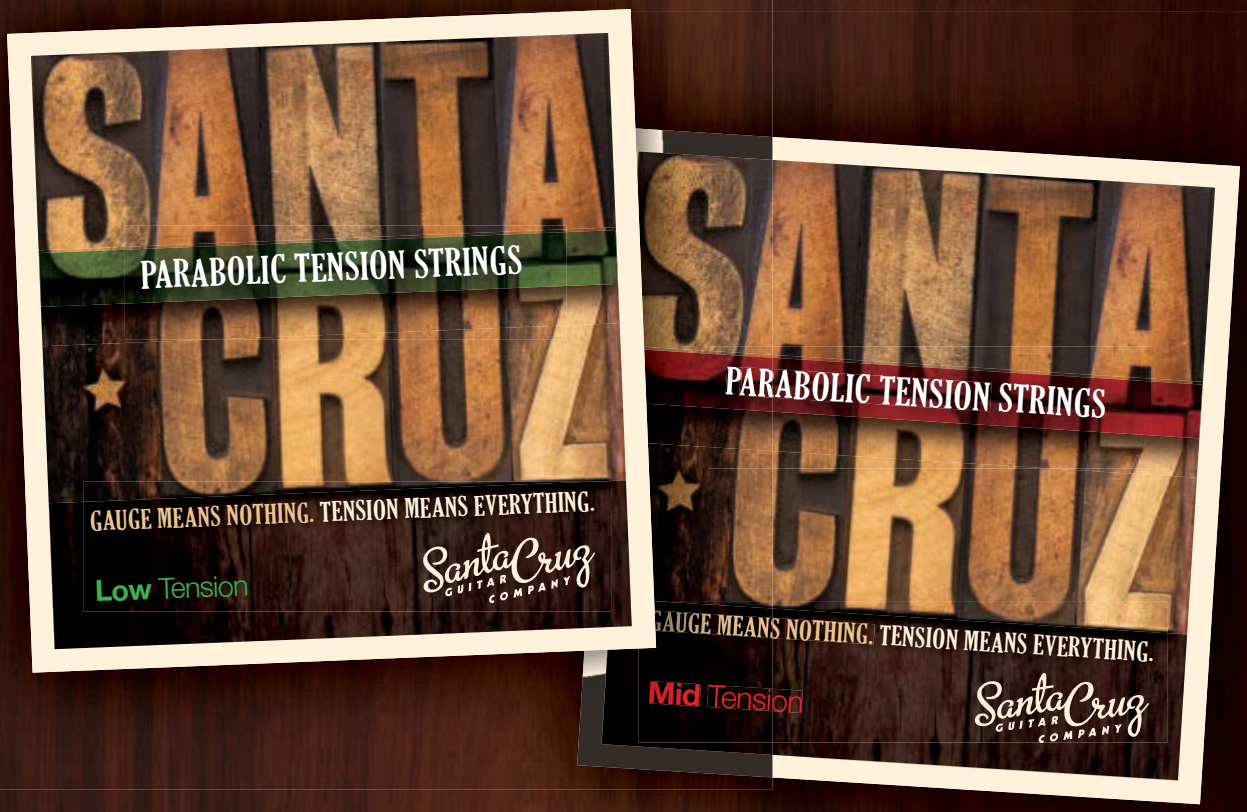

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How to Prepare a Delicious Amp Sandwich

BY JOE GORE

Are two amps (or three) better than one?

Um … sometimes. Recording guitarists often route their signal to multiple amps. Often it's because we aren't sure which will sound best until the production is complete. Sometimes it's to obtain a blended tone not available from a single amp. (Famous example: Stevie Ray Vaughan, who often recorded many amps simultaneously—dozens, by some accounts—before assembling a composite tone at the mixing desk.)

This month we'll look at various amp-blending techniques, from simply combining the natural sound of several amps to concocting complex "amp sandwiches" containing only particular frequencies from each amp.

Wall of amps. For these examples, I miked three amps: a shimmering Carr Skylark (a Fender blackface-inspired model), a blunt-nosed Marshall 18-watt clone, and a Divided by 13 CJ11, which has more of a Fender tweed flavor (**Photo 1**). I mixed mic types as well: There's a Neumann TLM-103 condenser on the Carr, a Royer 121 ribbon on the Marshall clone, and a Shure SM-57 dynamic on the CJ11. (Perched atop the Carr, my cat is in for a nasty surprise when I plug in.)

There are various ways to route a guitar signal to several amps, from multiple reamp boxes to simply using the stereo outs of a chorus or delay stompbox. Here I used a Lehle 1 at 3, a buffered splitter box with switches for each of its three outputs (**Photo 2**).

Meet our lovely contestants. In **Ex. 1** you hear each amp soloed in turn: Carr, Marshall clone, and CJ11. (The online version of this article has embedded audio.)

I've miked the Carr dead center on the speaker cone for a bright sound. The Marshall clone is also miked at center, but with the mic a bit closer for maximum bass *oomph* (plus, ribbon mics tend to deliver fat lows by default). And don't judge the lovely CJ11 by the tone heard here—just to try something new, I placed the SM-57 *way* off-axis—an experiment I probably won't repeat. The resulting tone is distant and diffuse, without particularly strong highs or lows. But as you'll hear, I found a way to incorporate even this stingy tone.

Spoiler alert, if you haven't already guessed: We're going to feature the Carr's highs, the Marshall clone's lows, and the CJ11's mids. But first, lets hear how the three amps sound together without extreme EQ (**Ex. 2**).

The amps are panned wide. The Carr and its reverb are all the way left (because I love the '60s-style sound of reverb on one channel only). The bass-heavy Marshall clone is center, and the CJ11 is fully right. It's a spacious, high-impact sound, though perhaps a bit dense in the low mids. **Ex. 3**, by contrast, employs only the Carr and the Marshall clone, slightly panned. It's got more percussive impact, at the cost of some midrange muscle. I could imagine either blend working, depending on the context.

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Extreme EQ. Now let's get our hands dirty. **Ex. 4** returns to the two-amp sound of Ex. 3, but this time I used EQ plug-ins to remove all lows from the Carr (**Photo 3**) and all highs from the Marshall clone (**Photo 4**). You hear each amp soloed, and both sounds are pretty nasty. But combined, the massively EQ'd signals yield a compelling composite tone. The sound may be a bit on the woolly side, but it's easy to adjust it by twiddling with the blend levels and EQ cutoff frequencies.

Now let's go full sandwich, inserting midrange from the third amp between the bass and treble "bread." Since the CJ11 sound as miked here is funky to begin with, I dialed in only a narrow EQ slice (**Photo 5**) for a retro-trashy transistor-radio tone. **Ex. 5** solos the CJ11 briefly before the Carr and Marshall clone join in.

Which version is best? It depends on the context.

Clean meets mean. Just for contrast, let's retrace our steps with a cleaner tone. Not entirely clean, though: As the soloed amps in **Ex. 6** reveal, I've kept the Marshall clone a bit trashy in hopes that I can "distress" the clean sound without surrendering its clarity.

The three amps appear together without EQ in **Ex. 7**. **Ex. 8** is the Carr and Marshall clone only, with no EQ. **Ex. 9** removes lows from the Carr and the highs from the Marshall clone. (You hear each amp soloed, and then both together.) And finally, the deluxe amp sandwich in **Ex. 10**. As before, you hear the CJ11 first (stripped of both highs and lows), and then the three-amp blend.

But is it worth it? Say it with me, people: *It depends on the context.* (I envy my fellow *PG* columnists who have snappy tag lines. If I had one, that would be it. But sadly, "It depends on the context" lacks the simple power of Dirk's "Keep on modding" or Pete's "I wish you good tone.")

The devil's advocate thinks this technique is a waste of time. "A good guitar and a good amp are perfect on their own," she says. "Besides, it's usually a bad idea to put off musical decisions till the mix. Just choose a tone and commit to it, damn it!"

The devil's advocate makes a strong case. But for better or worse, you'd never get these composite sounds from a single amp, and there are many classic examples of cool and distinctive tones wrung from multiple amps. So if you're of an experimental bent, give this method a go!

Until next month … it depends on the context! (No, that *totally* doesn't work.)

JOE GORE *has recorded and performed with Tom Waits, PJ Harvey, Tracy Chapman, Courtney Love, Marianne Faithfull, Les Claypool, Flea, DJ Shadow, John Cale, and many other artists. Joe has written thousands of articles about music and helps develop music tools for Apple and other clients. He blogs at tonefiend.com.*

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Upgrade Your Tele with an Electrosocket Jack Mount

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JOHN LEVAN

If you've ever owned a Telecaster, you may know how frustrating it is if the 1/4" output jack starts to get loose. On a Tele, the jack is held in a recessed cup secured to the body with a metal retainer clip embedded in the jack cavity. Over time, the simple action of plugging and unplugging your cable can bend or loosen the clip, making the signal short out while you're playing.

Fortunately, there's an excellent alternative to using a Tele's stock jack mounting hardware. Made by Electrosocket and available from such luthier suppliers as Allparts and Stewart-MacDonald, as well as vendors on Reverb.com and eBay, the machined aluminum jack mount attaches to the Tele body with two screws (**Photo 1**). The Electrosocket is inexpensive, easy to install, and—get this—it lets you adjust the output jack to accommodate a right-angle plug. Here's the best part: The Electrosocket stays put and can even prolong the life of your output jack. Let's investigate, shall we?

Project overview. Our project guitar is a '90s Fender Telecaster. When its owner brought it into the shop, the stock jack cup was very loose. We agreed it was time to replace it with an Electrosocket.

With one exception—which I'll explain in a moment—the tools required are all standard items you're likely to have in your toolbox: a medium Phillips head screwdriver, a 1/2" nut driver, and a drill with a 3/32" bit.

Okay, what about the specialized tool? Some background: The stock Tele jack clip is a piece of metal wedged into the circular cavity that houses the 1/4" jack and mounting cup. From the control cavity, the jack passes through a hole in the clip and then through a similar hole in the mounting cup. Threaded onto the jack, a 1/2" nut holds everything together from the exterior of the mounting cup. If the thin clip gets bent out of shape, the jack cup starts to wobble.

The trickiest part of this project isn't installing the Electrosocket, but rather removing the clip without damaging the cavity or surrounding finish. You can do this with a hammer and nut driver, but there's a much better way. Stew-Mac offers a nifty item called a Tele Jack Installation Tool (**Photo 2**). It costs less than $20 and lets you safely extract the stock clip by bending it in a controlled way—just enough to remove it from the jack cavity. I'll cover both techniques, but again, if you love your Tele, consider adding the TJIT to your toolbox.

Removing the stock jack cup. First unscrew the control plate from the top

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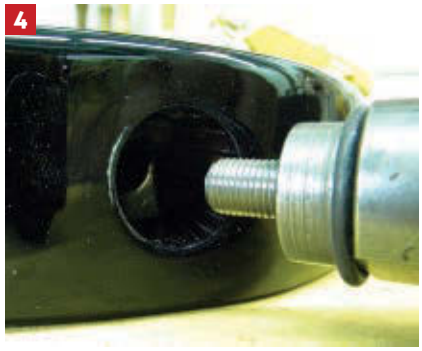
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Photo 1: Courtesy of Allparts.com

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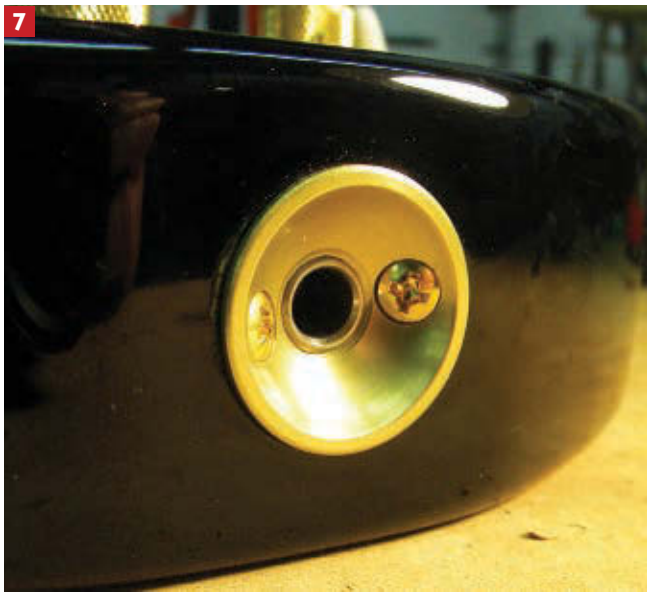

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The Electrosocket is inexpensive, easy to install, and—get this—it lets you adjust the output jack to accommodate a right-angle plug.

of the guitar and lift it off just enough to expose the control cavity. Next, use a 1/2" nut driver to remove the nut holding the output jack to the mounting cup. With your finger, push the jack back through the cup and clip, and into the control cavity. Remove the jack cup—it should pull right out of the cavity (**Photo 3**). If not, you may have to tap on it with your nut driver to break it loose.

Removing the jack clip. This is where it gets a bit more complicated. If you have a TJIT, remove the small ring from the end and slip the bolt into the cavity (**Photo 4**) and through the clip. Orient the small ring so its narrow end faces the clip, and then spin it back onto the bolt. Using the 5/16" hex key included with the tool, tighten the bolt until the clip is compressed into the TJIT. When the clip is fully compressed, pull the TJIT out of the cavity, removing the clip. Done!

If you don't have a TJIT, from the outside poke a 1/2" nut driver (a large flathead screwdriver also works) into the jack cavity and hold it against the clip. Gently tap the nut driver with a hammer until the clip bends just enough that you can remove it through the electronics cavity.

Installing the Electrosocket jack. Now it's time to place the Electrosocket over the jack cavity and drill the holes for the two mounting screws into the body (**Photo 5**). Use a 3/32" drill bit for these holes, which should be about 3/8" deep. Pay close attention to the angle of the Electrosocket's mounting holes. To ensure the Electrosocket sits flush against the cavity opening, you need to duplicate this angle when you drill. Another consideration: If you drill the holes too shallow, this prevents the Electrosocket from sitting flush.

Tip: Measure the target depth on your drill bit and then mark the "stop" point on the bit with a red Sharpie.

After the mounting holes are drilled, remove the Electrosocket and pull the jack out through the cavity. The Electrosocket has a threaded collar that matches Switchcraft-style output jacks (**Photo 6**), so simply screw them together, being careful not to twist or stress the jack's wires.

If you look closely at this photo, you'll see a lock washer sitting between the output jack and the Electrosocket. If you plan to use a guitar cable with a right-angle plug (something you can't do with a standard Tele jack cup), simply remove the lock washer before screwing the two parts together. This prevents a right-angle plug from slipping out.

Now place the assembly back into the cavity, aligning the Electrosocket's screw holes with the ones you just drilled. Install the mounting screws using a medium Philips screwdriver, making sure the Electrosocket fits snug against the body (**Photo 7**). Now reattach the control plate, and *shazam*—you're done!

JOHN LEVAN *has written five guitar repair books, all published by Mel Bay. His bestseller,* Guitar Care, Setup & Maintenance, *is a detailed guide with a forward by Bob Taylor. LeVan welcomes questions about his PG column or books. Drop an email to guitarservices@aol.com.*

Prep Like a Pro

BY VICTOR BRODÉN

A simple form chart is what I use to train my memory, ensure I know the form in my sleep, and have the confidence to lead the band through transitions.

When a tour hires personnel, they often do so by recommendation and don't hold auditions. When they *do* hold auditions, being confident you've learned the material as thoroughly as possible is absolutely crucial. I want to know that I've learned my part so well that it doesn't require me thinking when it really counts.

Many factors can derail you from repeating the perfect performance you just nailed at home after running through the tunes for the 50th time. These factors might include an amp you've never used before, playing the songs with live players instead of the recordings, stage lighting that's harsh, cameras aimed at you, lack of sleep because you were excited or nervous the night before, etc. That's why you have to know the songs *better* than great.

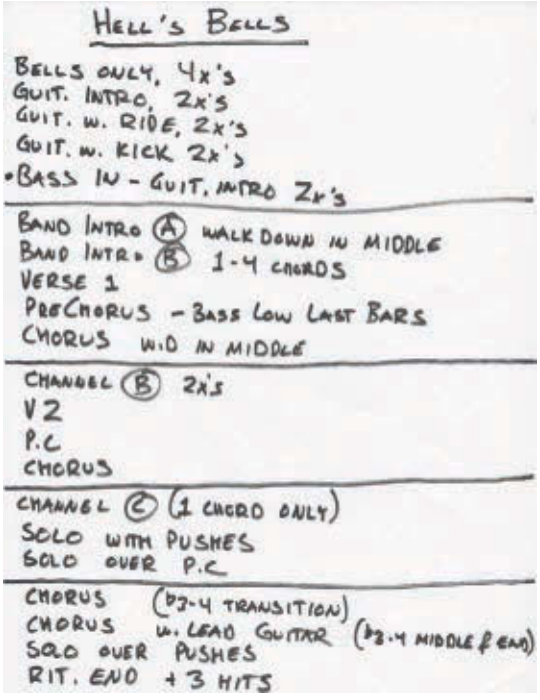
Form charts. All of us use a different learning process that suits our own brain. I find that if I write very detailed charts for a gig where I know I will eventually have to play *without* charts, it can be hard for me to make the transition. My method for learning songs for a gig without charts involves what I call form charts. These charts don't contain chords or any details about the bass line itself. They only contain information about the form and transitions between sections. One might think those details would be the easiest to remember, but they can sometimes be tricky for me. Since it's my job to lead the band into the next section, being exceptionally confident that I know where I'm going is of mighty importance.

A form chart is like written notes for public speaking. It's just a *skeleton* of what you're performing—something you can glance at while learning a song instead of something you're constantly looking at or actually reading. A form chart indicates the name of each section, and, if needed, how long every specific section is. I don't like to notate the actual amount of measures within a certain section unless I absolutely feel I have to. I like to think in riffs or patterns because I want to feel music, even in the early stages of learning.

If a song has a bass line that carries through the chord progression—which is the case in a lot of rock, pop, and soul music—I learn the bass line note for note *before* I write my form chart and I only notate how many times it repeats within, say, a verse. Again, I don't notate the actual pitches. That would be counterproductive for me in actually learning the song and notating pitches would effectively turn my form chart into an actual chart.

One thing at a time. When taking piano lessons as a kid, my teacher would have me start very slowly with one hand and have me work the part up to speed gradually. My teacher would then isolate the other hand, have me start *that* part very slowly, and work it up to speed in the same fashion. When combining the parts, my teacher would have me start back at a painstakingly slow speed even though I had mastered the parts separately at a quick tempo.

This was a great lesson in how to approach playing bass and singing at the same time. I'm not a great harmony singer by any stretch, but my ability to confidently sing basic harmonies adds tremendous value when auditioning for a new gig. If you aren't singing in your current band, I'd still encourage you to try singing in the privacy of your home to develop your skills. Tip: Do not try singing until the bass part is second nature. Once it is, learn the vocal part and figure out the details, inflections, and emotion *without* playing bass. I can't emphasize this enough. (Thinking like a vocalist when playing bass is a tremendous weapon to have in your conceptual musical-thinking arsenal, but that is another column altogether.)



Stand up. I'm usually sitting down for long periods of time when learning all the details and intricacies of the bass and vocal parts. Once I get to the point where I am comfortable with both parts, I then stand up and repeat the performance many times. Doing this changes where the bass hangs on the body (unless you wear your bass very high) and it definitely changes the way you sing since your abdominal support is much better standing up. And this way you're practicing the way you will perform at the audition or the gig.

There are few things more thrilling than a high-level audition and this is my basic process for prepping. Everyone expects the bassist to keep his or her cool, and if you are well prepared, you will.

VICTOR BRODÉN *is a Nashville bassist and producer who has toured and recorded with more than 25 major-label artists, including LeAnn Rimes, Richard Marx, Casting Crowns, and Randy Houser. You can reach him at vbroden@yahoo.com.*

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Amplifying an Acoustic Bass

BY HEIKO HOEPFINGER

Since the days of *MTV Unplugged*, many working bassists who would normally rock a solidbody electric have expanded their sonic palette with an acoustic bass guitar. When it's impractical for a band to perform with a drum kit and concert backline—perhaps an in-store promo gig, radio station, or intimate in-the-round show—an acoustic bass allows low-enders who don't play upright to hold down the bottom for their flattop-wielding mates. Though such performances are typically billed as "unplugged," the bassist still needs amplification to raise the acoustic bass above campfire volume levels.

Even when there's no electricity involved, we face the same problem with our low-frequency acoustics as when we plug in our solidbodies. Remember, compared to electric guitarists, we need far more power to amplify our signal to a useful level. Likewise, an acoustic bass needs far more body volume and soundboard area to keep up with an acoustic guitar, but even with the supersized body of the Stoll acoustic bass (**Photo 1**), you still might not be on par with the rest of the band. So once the audience grows to a certain size, you'll need an amp to be heard—and more important, the right pickup. Sorting through the plethora of pickup systems can be confusing, but fortunately they all boil down to a few principles.

Magnetic. As long as you use nickel or steel strings, magnetic pickups work on an acoustic bass, and you don't need a preamp to generate usable output. Unfortunately, mag pickups often sound more like an electric bass, as the cut-off peak prevents higher frequencies from getting through. (For more detailed info, read "Passive Tone Controls" on premierguitar.com.)

Optical. Not a real option, as no manufacturer currently offers an optical pickup for acoustic basses. But if you're curious about how this technology works, check out "Piezo and Optical Bass Pickups" on the *PG* website.

Microphone. A good mic could be the perfect transducer, but both internal and external mics are often plagued by feedback. Crosstalk is another difficulty mics create for a sound engineer. (Contact microphones are still microphones, but they fit better in the following group.)

Contact pickups. Although "contact" is not really a working principle, this group contains all the piezo, electrostatic- and electro-dynamic transducers, as well as contact microphones. These devices pick up vibrations in direct contact with the instrument and produce little feedback and almost no crosstalk. Despite their often inferior sound quality, low-cost contact pickups—especially the piezo variant—are the most popular transducers.

Contact pickups come in many different designs and technical constructions. But because most bassists spend their cash on their primary instrument—the electric bass—it's not surprising to see a secondary bass rigged with a cheaper system. That's why many players opt for a single under-saddle piezo pickup. A piezo pickup's high-impedance output requires an active buffer or preamp, partially negating the price advantage, but having onboard access to your main controls is a plus given the sensitivity of amplified acoustic instruments.

Essentially, an acoustic bass guitar bridge includes a simple plastic or bone saddle that sits on a piezo strip with the same footprint (**Photo 2**). The saddle's upper side acts as the intonation point and determines the action, while its underside presses down onto the piezo. A piezo element is very sensitive, and the simplicity of the construction often causes problems when it comes to picking up the strings at equal volumes. In particular, the outer strings can lose volume if a weak saddle bends upward at the ends. An unevenly routed saddle slot can also cause volume irregularity. This is less of an issue today, thanks to CNC-routed slots.

If you experience string-to-string volume issues, your best bet is to start by slightly sanding the saddle's underside absolutely flat. But the key word is *slightly*, as this also affects the action. If the problem persists, your only solution is to sand down the areas underneath the louder strings. This can be a long trial-and-error process, but that's the price we pay for using budget technology.

Nor are problems limited to the bottom of the contact area. On a purely acoustic instrument, you want the saddle to fit tightly within the slot. But if you're using an under-saddle pickup, make sure the saddle can easily move up and down to translate string motion. However, if it gets *too* loose, the saddle might tilt and put more pressure on an outer side instead of the entire piezo element. Tuning up evenly on all strings is one way to prevent the saddle from being caught askew. This sounds like a pretty sensitive system, but it works more often than not.

More complicated solutions can overcome these problems (sometimes generating new ones) and even add tonal value—a subject well worth checking out in another column.

HEIKO HOEPFINGER *is a German physicist and long-time bassist, classical guitarist, and motorcycle enthusiast. His work on fuel cells for the European orbital glider Hermes led him to form BassLab (basslab.de)—a manufacturer of monocoque guitars and basses.*

Photo 1: Courtesy of Andreas Schulz and leftover-visuals.de **Photo 2:** Courtesy of stollguitars.de

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Bassist Dallon Weekes, Panic! at the Disco

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SMALL-BODIED SMASH HITS

PG tests three astoundingly versatile acoustics from Martin, Taylor, and Larrivée.

It's easy to understand why dreadnoughts are the best-selling acoustic guitar type. On a shop floor and in the heat of a quick test drive, the average dread will sound bigger and bolder than just about anything else. But you have to wonder, if the average buyer had a whole day to lounge about and compare the average dread to a small-bodied flattop like the three guitars reviewed here, how would the big guy fare? Comfortable, pretty, compact, versatile, and nuanced—small bodies like 00s, 000s, and grand orchestras are full of personality, color, and subtlety. And they're typically pretty forgiving, if not flat-out superior, in recording situations.

The three guitars profiled in this roundup—the Larrivée OM-40, Martin 000-15M Burst, and Taylor 214ce SB DLX—offer a sometimes-startling breadth of sonic options in the $1,200–$1,500 range. If you're ready for an upmarket move from your affordable or mid-priced acoustic, each is an intriguing option full of surprises and rich rewards.

MARTIN
000-15M Burst

By Joe Gore

How do I love thee, mahogany? Let me count the ways: I love thee on old Les Pauls. I love thee on Fender-style "parts" guitars. (Try it and see!) But I most truly love the crap out of thee on small-bodied steel-string acoustics.

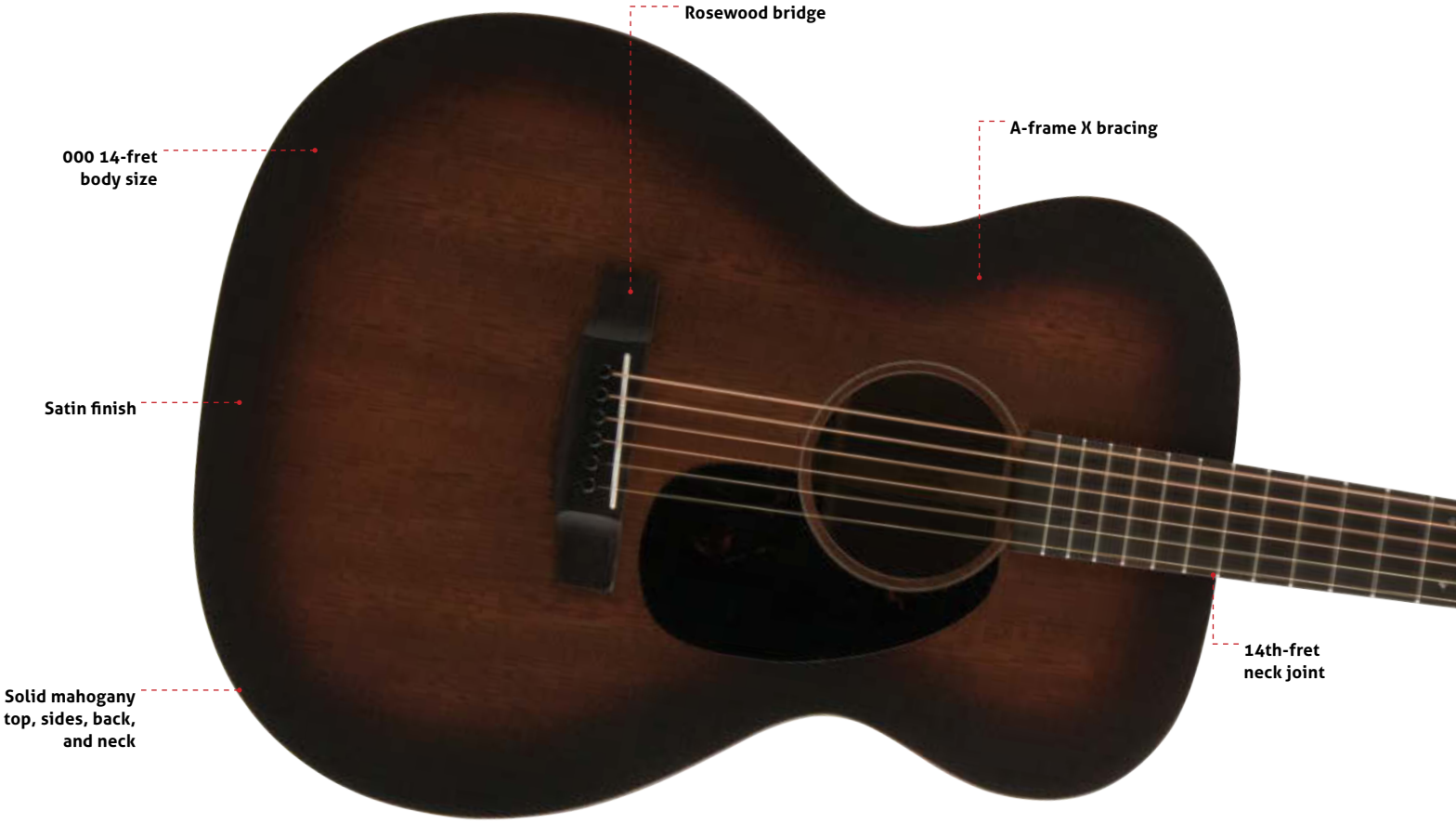
So no surprise that I adore this pretty new Martin. It's a simple but elegant 000 brimming with gorgeous, studio-ready tones at a sensible street price of $1,399.

Simple, Not Plain

There's no purfling or binding here—only a minimal rosette and understated pearlescent position markers. Instead, Martin invested in what counts: great-sounding materials and stellar workmanship. But despite its simplicity, this guitar is a looker, with an eye-catching burst top beneath a simple satin finish.

The 000-15M felt and sounded great right out the case. The frets are comfy, and the build is flawless. Yeah, there was some new-guitar tightness, but after an hour or so of playing, things seemed to open up, though maybe that's because I was learning how to exploit the guitar's expressive nature.

How expressive? Incredibly! This instrument boasts stunning dynamic range. I swear, it *makes* you play with increased drama and contrast. The same goes for its tonal range: Shifting your



picking hand in small increments yields big color shifts. I especially love the response when you pluck toward the fretboard—the warm, fat tones can sound almost like a nylon-string classical. (Thank you, mahogany. Did I mention that I love thee?)

Getting Picky

But before you run out to buy one of these, be aware of what small-bodied mahogany guitars can and can't do. This isn't a very loud instrument. Nor is it zingy: Notes have clear, decisive fundamentals, but you don't get the high-end sizzle typical of many modern acoustics. (Fine by me—I prefer these burnished, vintage-flavored tones.) All registers are beautifully balanced. There's no shortage of lows while recording, but the 000-15M tends not to project them strongly across the room.

Also, the guitar's hair-trigger response may simply be a little too volatile for some players. I don't want sound like a jerk by saying this is an instrument for advanced guitarists, but those with solid picking-hand technique will probably feel most at home here. And while I loathe the cliché that big-bodied guitars are for strumming and small bodied-ones are for fingerstyle, it's kind of true in this case. Pickstyle strumming can sound great at moderate levels, but aggressive strumming easily overpowers the guitar, and bearing down harder can paradoxically make tones seem smaller. The 000-15M probably isn't the right axe for heavy-handed open-G strummers.

But dang, does it record well! Savvy session players often prefer small-bodied acoustics because they realize that the lows and mids those models lack are precisely the frequencies that tend to get deliberately filtered out come mix time. Here, the pre-EQ sound is fabulous (though engineers are likely to boost the highs in many cases).

This guitar boasts stunning dynamic range. I swear, it *makes* you play with increased drama and contrast.

The Verdict

I love this pretty guitar and its warm, supremely expressive tones. The 000-15M doesn't respond particularly well to aggressive strumming or inconsistent technique, so this may not be a great choice if you need to fill a good-sized room without sound reinforcement. (Note, though, that this model is also available with built-in electronics, and it would probably sound great in big rooms when properly amplified.) But the 000-15M is most sublime in the studio, close-miked to capture all its gorgeous tonal detail. Provided you know what you're getting into with this body style and these materials, I can't recommend this guitar more highly.

WATCH A REVIEW DEMO of this guitar at premierguitar.com/jul2015

RATINGS

Martin 000-15M Burst

$1,399 street
martinguitar.com

Tones	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★½
Build/Design	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★

PROS Great build. Good looks. Ravishing tones.

CONS Easily overpowered by aggressive strumming.

TAYLOR
214ce SB DLX

By Charles Saufley

While Taylor makes exquisite and extraordinary high-end flattops, they have a well-deserved reputation as a safe bet for the everyman guitarist. The company's manufacturing practices—especially in the affordable and mid-priced ranges—emphasize consistency as much as productivity. Bob Taylor has always placed a premium on a well-rounded playability and agreeable tonality that work across many playing styles. It would be hard to find a guitar that better embodies these facets of Taylor's design philosophy than the stage-ready, solid-spruce and layered-rosewood 214ce SB DLX.

Eager to Please

At a glance, the Mexican-made 214ce SB DLX seems designed for players seeking a little flash in their lives. The rosewood-veneer back and sides boast spectacular (and expensive-looking) grain pattern. The pearloid rosette and deep amber-and-wine hues of the tobacco sunburst add additional splashes of fancy. The look isn't overstated or garish, but it has a stage presence that will appeal to those unburdened by puritanical flattop design notions.

Like most Taylors we see, the 214ce SB DLX is pretty much flawlessly assembled. There's not a trace of poorly sanded

bracing, no telltale marks of errant glue application. The seams at the neck joint and around the binding are perfect.

Bright Kid in the Class

I'm accustomed to (and happiest with) the mellow, toasty sounds of all-mahogany and mahogany-backed acoustics. So it's easy to be struck by how bright and willing the 214cs SB DLX feels in comparison to those flattop types. It's super-defined in the upper midrange. Fingerpicked notes and flatpicked arpeggios have popping immediacy well suited to the transparent-sounding Expression System 2 electronics.

The bright sonic profile means you don't have to fight too hard to generate ringing fingerstyle tones. The guitar also has excellent string-to-string balance that highlights the detail in melodic fingerstyle runs and chord melodies. The low-end output complements the chiming mids and highs. It's neither too burly nor anemic, with an almost piano-like sustain, especially in lowered tunings.

If there's a downside of this light-touch agreeability, it's that the guitar can sound a bit hyper when you dig in. Flatpick stabs that many bluegrass and blues pickers use as a matter of course can seem a bit thin compared to the contoured, overtone-rich sounds you get from flesh and nails on string. This tone recipe often works out well, especially when strumming with abandon. Here, the almost compressed quality of the Taylor reacting to the flatpick keeps chords nicely controlled for percussive or syncopated strumming. Beware though: To take advantage of this capacity, you must have a high tolerance for contemporary, midrange-heavy sounds.

The 214ce SB DLX has the personality of a willing, able, and well-dressed buddy riding shotgun.

The Verdict

The 214ce SB DLX has the personality of a willing, able, and well-dressed buddy riding shotgun. The forgiving electronics, mid-centric tone palette, and overall playability suggest that you could fill every role from rhythm support in a band to mellow fingerstyle accompaniment. What's more, the Taylor feels ready for the rough-and-tumble rigors of steady gigging. It's beautifully and sturdily built.

If this guitar comes up short with anyone, it will probably be fingerstylists who seek woody, earthy nuance, or singers and bands who prefer a more mysterious, husky acoustic sound. (Lo-fi artists who dig the subdued character of a dusty old Harmony need not apply.) If you could attach a short, all-encompassing description to the 214ce SB DLX (tough for a guitar that does so many things well!) it would be "high fidelity." If you like your acoustic tones lively, present, and distinct, this Taylor provides the perfect path to those ends.

WATCH A REVIEW DEMO of this guitar at premierguitar.com/jul2015

RATINGS

Taylor Guitars 214ce SB DLX

$1,249 street
taylorguitars.com

Tones
Playability
Build/Design
Value

PROS Beautifully playable (especially with a light fingerstyle touch). Flawless build. Transparent-sounding electronics.

CONS Midrange-heavy. A little compressed when you dig in hard.

LARRIVÉE
OM-40

By Charles Saufley

Like a benevolent mad scientist, Jean Larrivée bends acoustic design convention to beautiful and original-sounding ends. At first glance, the new OM-40 looks like one of the least idiosyncratic Larrivées in memory, but bracing modifications beneath the trad exterior help make this mahogany-and-spruce guitar a unique and often potent-sounding OM.

Trad with a Twist (or Two)

As the headstock shape, herringbone purfling and rosette, and diamond inlay less than subtly suggest, the OM-40 is partly an homage to Martin's OM-28. But this isn't some slavishly exact replica: The body and neck binding are pretty Canadian maple, the back and sides are mahogany like on an OM-18, and the whole guitar has an exceptionally smooth satin finish. The bracing, with its aggressive scalloping and parabolic shapes, also deviates from tradition. The craftsmanship is, for all practical purposes, perfect. The only trace of irregularity I found was the point where the two ends of back purfling meet—an offset of a fraction of a millimeter. Otherwise, the guitar looks like it was obsessively examined for blemishes with an electron microscope.

Properly Orchestral

Fingerstylists love OMs for their wide string spacing (1 ¾" at the nut). On a 25.5" scale, 14-fret neck, that means plenty of space for intricate picking, cool chord voicings, and bends. The Larrivée is inviting on all of these counts, though players with smaller hands may want to spend extra time with the guitar to determine whether the wide spacing inhibits playability or induces fatigue.

A spacious fretboard isn't the only way the OM-40 is oriented toward fingerstylists. It's very responsive to a soft touch, and it feels especially dynamic and expressive when you go easy with your picking hand. The flip side to this sensitivity is that the midrange can sound downright explosive if you play heavily or use fingerpicks. At times, the midrange was aggressive enough to overpower the ample bass output, which is impressive for a guitar of this size. Tuned down to D, the bottom string generates the kind of rib-shaking low end you associate with a jumbo, especially with the extra punch of a flatpick. Played with a bare thumb, is has a pretty, blooming resonance.

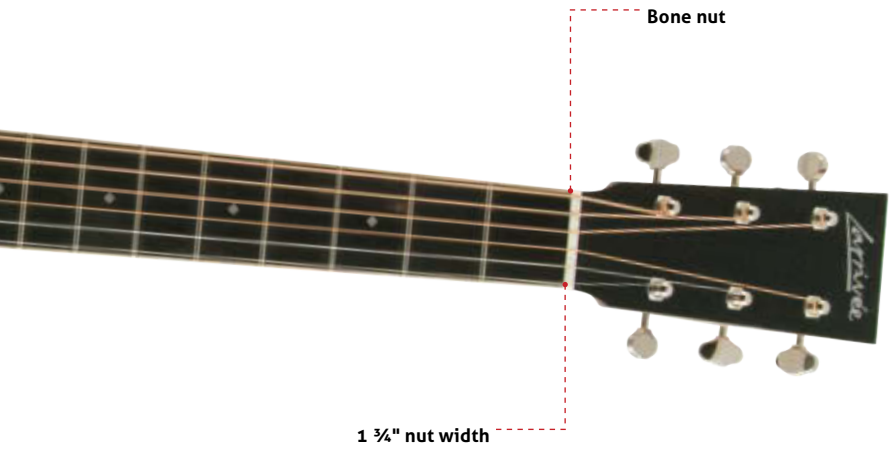
As lovely as the OM-40 sounds when plucked with the fingers, it can be bratty and brash when strummed hard. Notes that sound lively and ringing (especially on the third and fourth strings) can seem upper-mid heavy when you dig in with a flatpick. Even with a lighter touch, the sonic sum of all six strings strummed sound a little, well, contemporary—hopped-up in the mids and bit compressed. Given how expertly this guitar is built and how great it sounds when played lightly, you have to wonder if time will soften these tendencies. At least some of the brashness from first-position chords seems like the result of new strings meeting glimmering new frets without a trace of mellowing patina. The guitar just feels like it needs a little breaking in.

Tuned down to D, the bottom string generates the kind of rib-shaking low end you associate with a jumbo.

The Verdict

The OM-40 is really a fingerstylist's machine. Even though this guitar is likely to achieve better balance over time, its midrange is just a touch too aggressive to sound sweet for heavy flatpicking. But if you tend to forego flatpicks and fingerpicks for the feel of bare flesh and nails on strings, you'll find the OM-40 beautifully balanced and full of expressive range. While our test guitar had no electronics, it's easy to imagine how a nice pickup—particularly a magnetic one—could mellow out the twitchy and sometimes explosive midrange, making this a killer stage guitar for fingerstyle players. The OM-40 isn't for everyone, but it could be a go-to machine for nuanced fingerstylists.

WATCH A REVIEW DEMO of this guitar at premierguitar.com/jul2015



RATINGS

Larrivée Guitars OM-40

$1,424 street
larrivee.com

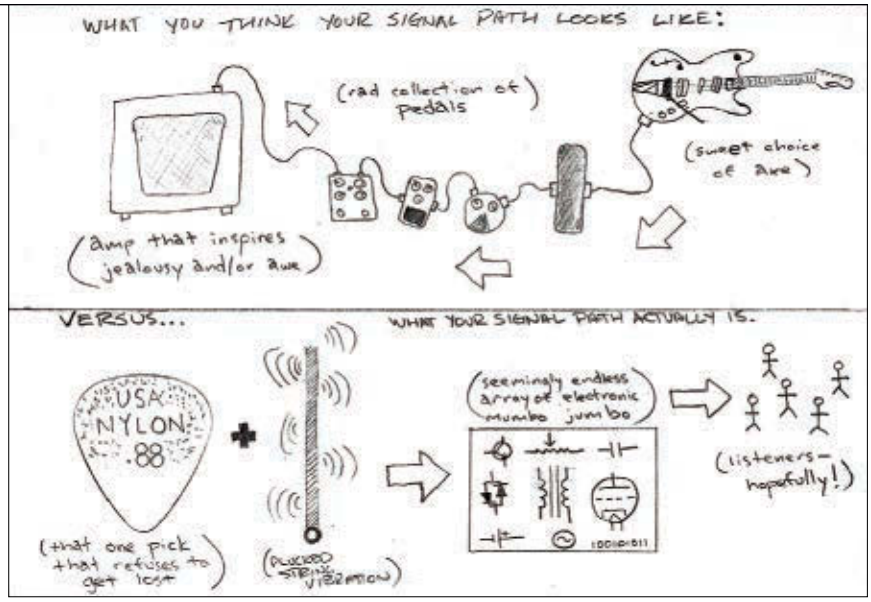
Tones	●●●●○
Playability	●●●●○
Build/Design	●●●●●
Value	●●●●○

PROS Beautifully sensitive, dynamic, and responsive to light fingerpicking. Near-flawless construction. Resonant bass.

CONS Brash midrange when strumming.

The Myth of "Real" Guitar Tone

BY PHILIPPE HERNDON



Last time ("More Sounds from Fewer Pedals," April 2015) I suggested using fewer redundant overdrives. A few readers got their noses out of joint, but most took it pretty well. Some even had useful suggestions, so thank you!

I promised this time I'd suggest what to use in the freed-up space, but as Arnold Schwarzenegger said in *Commando* (aka *The Greatest Story Ever Told*), "You remember when I promised I'd kill you last? I lied." Take the money you made selling them and treat yourself to an expensive sandwich. I recommend anything with pesto.

Many readers interpreted my previous column as a call to arms. Fewer pedals! Less technology! More real tones! I get it: When green-banana players show up for an open mic with pedalboards large enough to serve an extended family brunch from, you're entitled to gasp, guffaw, even chortle. When they then serve up nothing tastier than preset swells that wouldn't qualify for James Calvin Wilsey's discard pile, it's enough to send you into a fit of nostalgic machismo, followed by weeks of playing nothing but *Exile on Main St.* riffs.

"Real" rock reality check. Sadly, "real rocker" friends, this is the part where I cannot be your Bono at the US Festival, marching with your flag during the snare break and planting it stage center at Red Rocks. The idea of pure, natural, authentic, or more "real" guitar tones is a farce. Once you've plugged in, you're basically making electronic music.

Like Emperor Palpatine or Tucker Carlson, I can feel your anger through the page. "*Electronic music?!* That's the realm of dudes who wear stupid helmets on stage, adult film 'actresses' posing as DJs, and Moby! How dare you compare my [insert favorite genre] to that garbage?"

To which I say, "Careful with that axe, Eugene!" Nobody's comparing anyone to Moby here. I've funded my gear habit in the food-service industry too, and heard my share of *Play* on nonstop repeat during a shift.

The long journey from pick to ear. Still, the idea of "real" or "natural" guitar tones is a bit of a fantasy. Consider your favorite "raw" recorded electric guitar tone. Imagine your hero plucking the strings with a plectrum made from some petroleum distillate. (Oh I get it—you're a Jeff Beck fan. Fine. His thumb and fingers then. May we continue?) The nickel/steel string vibrations disturb a magnetic field created by thousands of copper winds around magnetically charged material, an inductor that converts this disruption into alternating current that negotiates a voltage divider and a low-pass filter to arrive at the guitar's output jack. From there, it continues through a length of stranded copper and shielding, weathering fidelity-compromising capacitance before arriving at the input of the guitar amplifier. From there, the signal navigates multiple gain stages, tone stacks, possibly some phase inversion, decoupling caps, and Ken Fischer knows what else before getting the *Six Million Dollar Man* treatment: juiced up enough to move paper cones back and forth with sufficient force to create audible waves and sound pressure.

Next, a microphone capsule senses this pressure, converts it to another signal that runs through various preamps, compressors, recording-console circuitry, and outboard gear, then onto the tape machine or digital audio workstation, where it is subjected to the bandwidth limitations and frequency response of the media, and that's before we get to the sonic airbrushing that takes place during mixing and mastering.

Not how, but *why*? Before I fall asleep typing the balls-to-ovary conception story of your favorite tones, does any of that sound like anything that occurs in nature? I'm not telling you not to care about your gear choices—far from it. Instead, ask yourself some tough questions: Ponder *why* you think of some tones as more "real" than others. With the arc of human expression and musical technology spanning thousands of years, is drawing a line at the 1970s, the 1950s, or whatever your favored era of guitar technology is, an arbitrary decision—maybe even hair-splitting? Are your choices about what you honestly enjoy and what you want to express? Or have you just bought into someone else's idea of "authenticity," one that might be holding you back?

PHILIPPE HERNDON *is the founder and chief product designer at Caroline Guitar Company. One day he might actually get around to making a guitar. He likes pretty much any British TV series that NetFlix recommends for him.*

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AEW40ZWNT
Zebrawood top, back & sides
Maple Rosette

AEW40ASNT
Ash top, back & sides
Maple Rosette

AEW40CDNT
Cordia top, back & sides
Maple Rosette

AEW2212CDNT
Spruce top, Cordia back & sides
Cordia/Spalted Maple/Rosewood Rosette

Cleaning Up an Acoustic Guitar—from the Inside!

BY DIRK WACKER

I'd like to thank you for all your feedback about Mod Garage's first column on acoustic guitars ("Conquering Classical Guitar String-Changing Terror," February 2015). By popular demand, here's another acoustic-oriented column, just in time for this issue's acoustic theme. Our topic: cleaning out an acoustic guitar's interior.

Free surprise inside! When you add an old acoustic guitar to your arsenal, chances are it'll be full of dust, dirt, and other things that have accumulated over the years, especially if the guitar was stored on a stand or wall rather than in a case. Most of this debris builds up naturally over time, but I've found the oddest things inside old guitars: picks, woodchips, string ball-ends, pet feces, gigantic dust bunnies, toasted plant parts, a mummified mouse (former nest included), and most memorably, a very old handwritten letter folded and glued inside the soundboard.

Such debris can tell us a lot about a guitar's history, but it's not always fun removing the stuff. Additionally, old acoustic guitars often smell bad inside due to a combination of old dust and moisture. But don't worry—I'll show you how to clean things up in a few simple steps. My procedure isn't the only possible method, but we've used it in our shop for many years with great results. It works equally well for steel- and nylon-stringed guitars, and it's dirt-cheap.

Enter the parlor. Our demo model is a MAFIMA parlor guitar built in the 1920s in Markneukirchen, Germany, which a customer brought in for a full restoration. (MAFIMA was the brand of luthier Max Fischer, derived from the words "MAx FIscher MArkneukirchen.") Our customer bought it at a flea market without a case. It was in surprisingly good shape for its age, but it was full of dust and dirt, and inside it smelled like an old museum hall with a waxed floor that hadn't been cleaned for decades—not very appealing.

When you add an old acoustic guitar to your arsenal, chances are it'll be full of dust, dirt, and other things that have accumulated over the years.

The first step is easy: Remove the strings, turn the guitar upside down with the soundhole facing the ground, and shake for several minutes until any large, loose debris falls out. It's a good idea to do this outside—you may be surprised by the amount of debris you encounter!

Next, grab your vacuum and a duster. You can also use any piece of cotton cloth or an old, clean sock. Disconnect any attachments from the vacuum's hose, and then wrap the duster or cotton cloth around the end of the hose, securing it with a rubber band (**Photo 1**). Turn on the vacuum, put the hose inside the guitar, and hoover everything up (**Photo 2**). The duster protects the inside of your guitar from damage.

Those hard-to-reach places. Now use a small extension vacuum hose like the one shown in **Photo 3**. You can buy these for a few bucks at most home improvement and computer stores. (To prevent damage, I only use the kit's small, soft hose.) With this neat little toy you can vacuum all the spots inside the guitar that your standard vacuum hose can't reach.

By now most of the dust and dirt should be gone, but the next two steps should get *everything* out. The idea is to loosen the rest of the dirt with shots of high-pressure air, and then suck it up as it's flying around with the vacuum hose. We have an air compressor at the shop, but you can use a can of compressed air that's sold to blow dust out of computer keyboards.

Return to your vacuum's standard-sized hose and remove the duster. Power up your vacuum to full throttle—*yeah*. Insert the hose into the soundhole and simultaneously blow into the body towards its lower end (**Photo 4**). If your guitar has an endpin hole, make sure to seal it temporarily so no pressure escapes. Don't overdo it—too much air pressure can damage loose braces. Repeat several times and don't inhale when your mouth is near the soundhole! It's also a good idea to wear goggles.

Alternatively, you can use a hairdryer at its highest speed, but *only* with unheated air. (Never blow hot air into an old acoustic guitar. The aged glue can soften, and you don't want braces falling from the soundboard.)

The rice stuff. Our last step is the funniest one. You need two things: a piece of cardboard, plastic, or wood veneer to cover the soundhole, and a package of rice (**Photo 5**). Use the cheapest big package of rice you can find. Pour the rice into the soundhole. (Don't insert the packaging!) Cover the soundhole and shake the devil out of the guitar for several minutes. Remove the soundhole cover and pour the rice from the guitar into a bin. You'll probably be surprised by the grains' dirty appearance. Get a new package of rice for your next guitar. Boiling and eating used rice is not recommended.

Now if you look inside your guitar with a mirror or endoscope, you'll see a very clean guitar body (**Photo 6**).

I always take care with the logo sticker, assuming there's enough of it to preserve (**Photo 7**). Simply use a damp cotton cloth to clean the sticker, avoiding pressure. Make sure the cloth isn't too wet, or the sticker may come loose or crumble. Let it dry for some time. (You can use a sheet of blotting paper to speed up drying time.) To preserve the sticker, I apply a thin layer of clear coat or shellac with a soft brush. You can add some amber-colored stain to the lacquer so the sticker looks old.

This guitar stinks! Finally, let's remove that nasty smell. There are techniques galore for this, but I prefer non-chemical ones, because you never know how wood and glue will react to chemicals. One good technique is to put some fresh lavender in a thin cotton pouch and place it inside the guitar, hanging from a strand that protrudes from the soundhole for easy removal. Block the soundhole with your previously used cover, and leave the lavender inside the guitar for a few days or weeks until the bad smell has vanished. Alternatively, you can use flavored tea instead of fresh lavender—just choose an aroma you like. (One of our flamenco-playing customers does this with a flavored tea that smells like fresh espresso. He says it inspires his playing.)

That's it! Next month we'll return to electric guitar mods and discuss "The Trouble with Tribbles." Until then, keep on modding!

DIRK WACKER *lives in Germany and has been a guitar addict since age 5. He's also a hardcore DIY-er for guitars, amps, and stompboxes and runs a website on the subject (singlecoil.com). When not working at his guitar workbench, he plays country, rockabilly, surf, and flamenco. Contact him at info@singlecoil.com..*

Beefing Up a Vintage Fender Vibrolux Reverb

BY JEFF BOBER

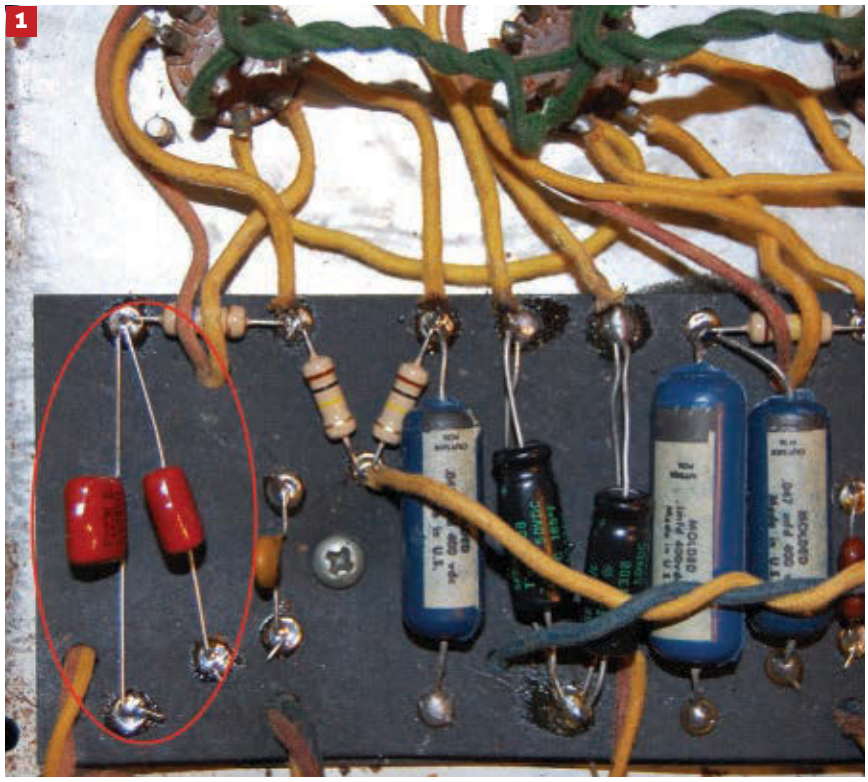
This month I've decided to forgo answering a question—not that I don't have plenty, and thank you for that, loyal readers. Instead we'll explore a mod to a blackface Fender Vibrolux Reverb and the thinking behind it. It's an easy and completely reversible that yields what I consider to be a more versatile amp.

Not long ago, a customer brought me a Vibrolux combo he'd recently acquired. He wanted to make it one of his regular gigging amps, so he asked me to make sure it was roadworthy. He wanted new caps, tubes, and whatever else was needed. He also wanted to remove and safely stash the original speakers while they were still in working condition. His idea was to thrash a new set of speakers on gigs and not be concerned about reliability or destroying a piece of Fender history.

Replacing speakers is actually a great upgrade for any amp of this era because speakers grow tired over the years, and a fresh set can yield a far greater improvement than most players would believe. In fact, when I install new speakers in an old amp, the owner typically experiences a *wow* moment. (If you have an older amp, try it—you might have that reaction too.)

Before I dive into repairing or modding an amp, I always ask how the owner expects to use it. For example: Do you like to play dirty, or are you after a big, clean tone with maximum headroom? This feedback gives me an idea of what type of tubes to install and how to tailor the circuit to the player.

It turned out this customer performs a lot of music inspired by Jonny Lang and Kenny Wayne Shepherd. Great—this gave me a reference and prompted me to offer some suggestions. We all know these players were very influenced by the late, great SRV. In my brief time working with Stevie before his death, I saw that his massive backline included two Fender Super Reverb combos, each loaded with four Electro-Voice 10s—his favorite speakers for these amps. How he managed



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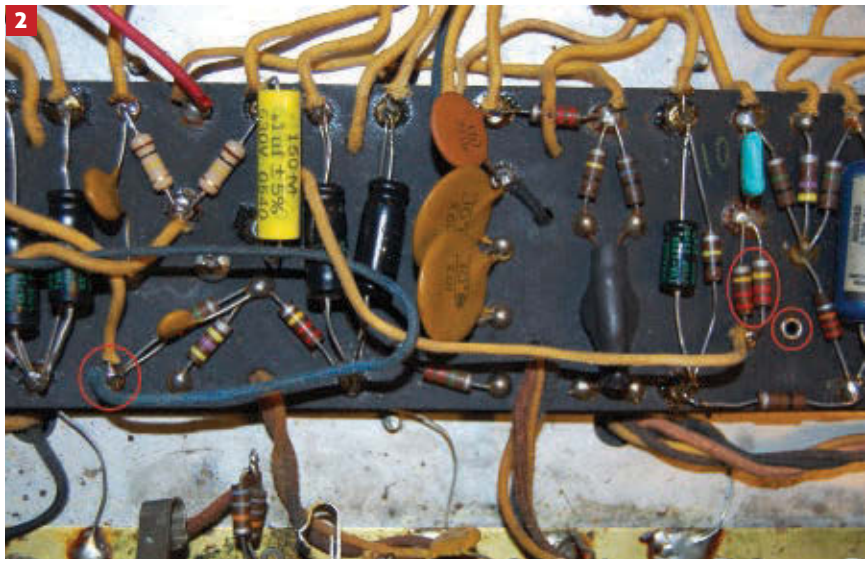

2

WARNING:
All tube amplifiers contain lethal voltages. The most dangerous voltages are stored in electrolytic capacitors, even after the amp has been unplugged from the wall. Before you touch anything inside the amp chassis, it's imperative that these capacitors are discharged. If you are unsure of this procedure, consult your local amp tech.

to blow speakers with such *massive* power handling capability with a 40-watt Super is beyond me, but his tech at the time, the legendary René Martinez, always had spares on hand. Anyway, let's see what this knowledge can do for my customer.

First, a Vibrolux Reverb is a bit like a mini Super Reverb. With a dual-6L6 output stage, the amps offer about the same power, but the Vibrolux has two 10s instead of the Super's quad set. But they're voiced differently: While most blackface and silverface Fenders use the same value capacitors in the tone stack—a 250 pF, a 0.1 µF, and a 0.047 µF—the Super Reverb has a 0.022 µF cap in place of the 0.047 µF.

My suggestion was to modify the tone stack in the Vibrolux's first channel. This way, one channel would remain stock, the other would be a bit more like a Super, and he could use an A/B switch to access either channel as desired.

Regarding speakers: Unless you can afford a roadie, I wouldn't advise loading a Super or even a Vibrolux Reverb with EV 10s. These bad boys are heavy! Instead, I suggested swapping in a lighter set of contemporary 10s that sound similar to the EVs. The owner agreed, so let's look at what we did.

Photo 1 shows how I've installed not one but two new caps in the amp's first channel. I like replacing both the .047 *and* 0.1 µF caps with .022 µF caps. It makes the channel a bit beefier, and that's nice for a guitar with single-coil pickups. It also leans more towards a Marshall tone stack at this point ... but not quite. Of course, Stevie was also a Marshall guy (got to love those 200-watt Majors), so if you *really* want to go all the way, you can replace the 250 pF treble cap with a 470 pF, but that's not something I wanted from this particular amp.

Now, at this point I'm sure some of you are saying, "Yeah, cool, but there's no *reverb* on the first channel." Well my friends, I have a bonus for you. Look at **Photo 2** and notice the blue wire. That's the audio signal wire from channel 1, which was originally connected to the circled eyelet on the right. Simply remove the wire from this connection at the input of the phase inverter and connect it to the input of the reverb drive circuit, as illustrated on the left of the photo. This routes the channel 1 signal to the reverb *and* tremolo circuits. Cool—one more bonus! Finally, for just a little extra push, I like to move the unused 220k resistor and place it in parallel with the other 220k resistor at the input to the phase inverter (see photo).

After making these mods, I installed a new pair of 10" speakers (**Photo 3**), and the amp was ready for the road.

JEFF BOBER *is one of the godfathers of the low-wattage amp revolution. He co-founded and was originally the principal designer for Budda Amplification, though he launched EAST Amplification (eastamplification.com) in 2010. You can catch his podcasts at ampsandaxescast.com or email him at pgampman@gmail.com.*

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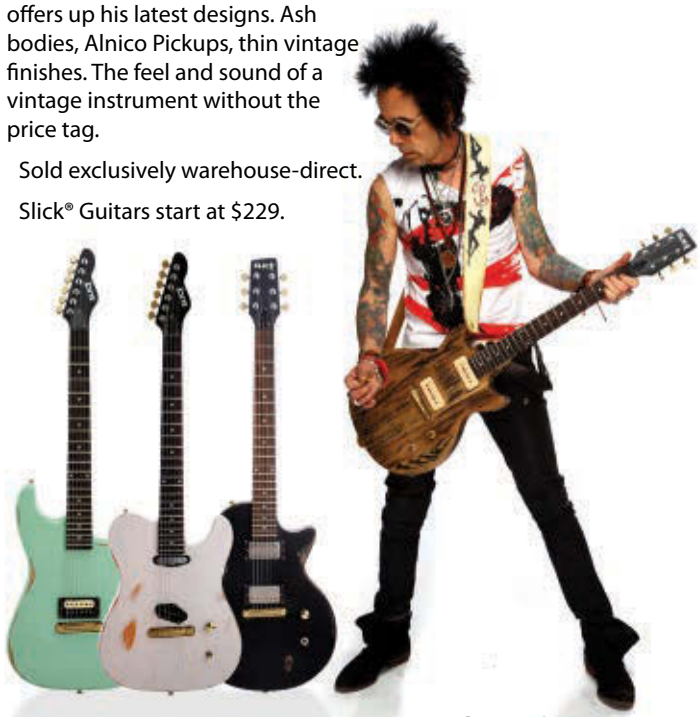

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BOOM-BOOM

BEYOND THE BEDROOM

We size-up four surprisingly versatile sub-$500 amps from Ampeg, Hartke, Fender, and Ashdown.

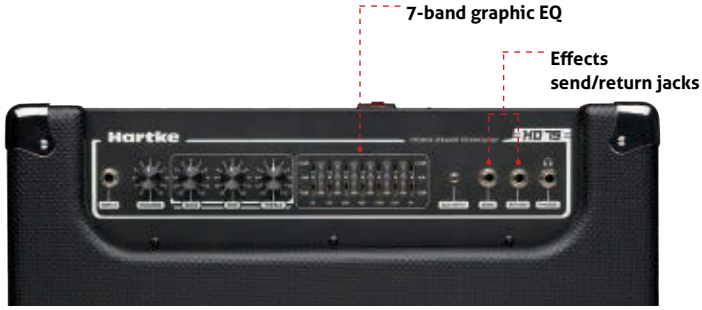
BY STEVE COOK

Bass amplification has evolved though many stages, but the basic notion of an amp and speaker in a single enclosure has served bassists well for more than 60 years. The current generation of bass combos make bassists' lives a little easier with back-saving portability, great tones, and floor-shaking power.

This roundup covers the smaller end of the combo world: the latest 1x12 options. Models of this caliber are often deemed bedroom or practice amps, but here, the manufacturers have more in mind. We often need something smaller than our stadium rig for intimate gigs, writing rooms, or rehearsal, and all these combos bring enough beef to be considered more than practice tools.

We examine the Ampeg B-112, Fender Rumble 100, Hartke HD75, and Ashdown Rootmaster 220 from top to bottom. In each case, the manufacturer attempts to capture its signature big-amp sound in a compact combo that speaks louder than its modest footprint might suggest. In the bass arena, where bigger often seems to be better, these little powerhouses remind us that it's not about the size of the rig, but how you use it. And did we mention they're all under $500?

HARTKE
HD75



In 1985, *Back to the Future* was a box-office hit, the Live Aid concerts were huge successes, and Larry Hartke introduced aluminum-cone speakers to unsuspecting bassists shortly after building a cab with the drivers for Jaco. Hartke's new HD-series combo amps sport an even more radical speaker design. Let's look at the compact HD75.

Hartke the Herald Angels Sing

The HD75 is a straight-ahead 75-watt amp with a single 12" HyDrive speaker. The HyDrive isn't all-aluminum, but part metal and part paper cone. The goal is a speaker with the snap of aluminum and the warmth of paper.

Without effects, a tuner, or superfluous functions, the HD75 does one simple job: amplifying your bass. Some players prefer built-in extras, but I'd rather have an amp that sounds great with no distractions than a mediocre rig with clutter.

At a little over 48 pounds, the HD75 it is a touch heavy for a smaller amp. With little on the back panel beside a power plug and on/off switch, a balanced DI out would have taken the amp one step further, and a top-panel power indicator would be more convenient than having to look around back. But on a $250 amp, these are small-beans issues.

The top-panel controls are straightforward: There's a master volume control, and then two EQ sections: a modified tone-stack design with bass, mid, and treble pots, and 7-band graphic EQ with a +/-12 dB slider for each frequency. Next come an 1/8" auxiliary input, 1/4" effect send (which can also serve as a line out) and return jacks, and a 1/4" headphone jack that mutes the speaker for private practicing.

Rock and a Hartke Place

I plugged in a stock Fender Squier Precision Bass and started with the bass, mid, and treble controls at noon and the graphic EQ zeroed out. The first tones out of the HD75 did not disappoint. I happen to be a paper-cone guy, so hearing the sound as advertised with no EQ was impressive. Tones have nice attack, and while there's a little more bite than I'm used to, the wide-ranging EQ section helps tremendously. Just turning the bass pot up to +3 (1 o'clock) made the combo feel warm and familiar.

The HD75's EQ controls are fun and effective, but they may be a bit daunting for the untrained. Boosting too much of any one thing can quickly make the amp too harsh or too boomy, and novices might mix themselves right out of rehearsal if not careful. But even with the high-frequency EQ controls pushed way up, the feared shrillness of an aluminum speaker never appears—just über-crisp tones.

Despite its size, the HD75 shouldn't be relegated to the bedroom. It's got enough oomph for jazz-brunch and coffeehouse gigs or small rock rehearsals. (I did try pushing the HD75 to the edge, but its built-in limiter ensures safe levels, protecting the gear.)

The Verdict

I like this sharp-looking, no-nonsense combo. Its blend of modern and vintage sounds via the hybrid speaker gives the amp a unique identity. It's a great option for beginning players, who can practice, rehearse, and play small gigs without needing to upgrade.

CLICK HERE TO WATCH A DEMO of this combo at premierguitar.com/jul2015

RATINGS

Hartke HD75

$249 street
samsontech.com

Tones	★★★★½
Ease of use	★★★★½
Build/Design	★★★½
Value	★★★★½

PROS Flexible EQ. Attractive vintage-meets-modern tones.

CONS No DI. A bit heavy. Power-indicator light on rear only.

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AMPEG
BA-112

Ampeg has long been famous for its iconic, all-tube bass amps—specifically, the vintage "flip-top" B-15 and various iterations of the thundering SVT head. But for many years the company has also offered the BA series of smaller, more practical alternatives for working musicians with humbler means and needs. The entire BA line was recently revamped, and here we're taking a look at the newest edition of the BA-112, an affordable, 75-watt 1x12 combo that packs a punch with smart, usable features—including a taste of the signature SVT tone.

Tilt Back and Fly

The BA-112 features what the company calls its Legacy preamp, a 3-band EQ with ultra-hi and ultra-lo pushbuttons, as well as a Scrambler circuit whose name might confuse some vintage-stompbox aficionados: It's intended to emulate an overdriven SVT, *not* the short-lived Scrambler fuzz pedal that Ampeg released in 1969 (and reissued about nine years ago). The BA-112 also has a -15 dB input pad for active basses, and both 1/4" and 1/8" auxiliary inputs, with a single front-panel level control.

The amp weighs 42 pounds—a little heavy in my book—but its footprint is not much bigger than your typical live monitor wedge. Interestingly, the BA-112's cabinet also features an angled design that lets you turn it horizontally and lean it back to a 60-degree angle for stage-friendly monitoring. I've played many a small stage with my amp primarily blasting away at my knees rather than my ears, so kudos to Ampeg for this practical design feature.

Scrambled and Rocked

I tested the BA-112 with a '75 Fender Jazz reissue, and with the EQ set flat the amp's character had a lot of what many players envision when they think "Ampeg"—it's bold and unapologetic. The Scrambler circuit, which is activated via a front-panel pushbutton, features drive and blend controls. Blending just a hint of the overdrive signal is key to getting SVT-ish tones (higher settings can sound pretty harsh). For me, the sweet spot was with drive at noon and blend at about 10 o'clock. This gave my bass a big bottom end with the perfect amount of grit. I was also impressed at how the ultra-lo switch helped me coax even more *oomph* from my J.

The Verdict

The BA-112 has a lot of Ampeg attitude wrapped up in a svelte, solid package. The all-steel chassis and solidly braced cabinet seem ready to endure a long life of being schlepped from rehearsal to gig and back home again. Of course, big tone and punchiness are just as important, and this amp's got both. Considering the BA's humble power rating, it's no surprise it doesn't move mountains, volume-wise. However, it is well suited to its purpose: It's a really good rehearsal amp at a fair price. The Scrambler overdrive is a nice bonus, but even without it this is one great little combo. Tilt it back and let it rip!

CLICK HERE TO WATCH A DEMO of this combo at premierguitar.com/jul2015

RATINGS

Ampeg BA-112

$299 street
ampeg.com

Tones	♥♥♥♥♡
Ease of use	♥♥♥♥♡
Build/Design	♥♥♥♥♡
Value	♥♥♥♥♡

PROS Big tones. Impressive feature set. Dirt on demand—including SVT-style tones—with the Scrambler circuit.

CONS A little heavy for its size. No DI or tuner output.

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ASHDOWN
Rootmaster 220

Ashdown Engineering has been anchoring the low end on some of the world's biggest tours for the better part of two decades now, boasting such notable artist endorsees as Foo Fighters' Nate Mendel, U2's Adam Clayton, and Pino Palladino (the Who, John Mayer). In addition to their high-end ABM line and all-tube custom-shop designs, Ashdown offers the Rootmaster series of amps and combos for everyday players. The new RM-C112-220 here packs beauty and features inspired by high-end Ashdown amps into a compact, affordable package.

Deep Roots

At almost 50 pounds and 220 watts, the 220 is a stout bugger in every sense. (Ashdown says they have since brought the weight down to 36 pounds.) It's loaded with a single 12" Ashdown speaker and a full-featured front panel. Top-row dials control the 5-band EQ, while the bottom row governs more nuanced functions. The shape button engages a scooped-mid EQ response, while EQ in/out bypasses the upper knobs to serve up the amp's foundational tones. Both options are great, though I wish you could control them with the optional footswitch. Next in line are dials for input gain, compression level, compression and drive on/off buttons, drive level, sub harmonics, output level, and line mix (which governs the rear-panel 1/8" aux input).

The rest of the back panel is worth mentioning, too, because Ashdown provides useful expansion and output options: a 1/4" DI output, effects send and return, and a Speakon connector that lets you add an extension cab to make this a true small-club amp.

Rooting for Rumble

The 220 made it easy for my Yamaha BB1025X to get a great, full tone right out of the box. The shape control proved to be a quick flavor enhancer, and pairing it with deft top-row EQ tweaks made it even more useful. I gave the low end a healthy bump and the amp still handled the Yamaha's 5th string with ease.

As you'd expect from its control set, the 220 offers up a heap of tonal options—from edgy to round and everything in between. At its core, the amp is all Ashdown: midrange-y and warm. It's pretty easy to get a mix-friendly tone in no time. The sub-harmonic feature is great to have, although you have to crank it all the way up to get full-on, octave-dive coolness. The drive control is useful when you want some edge to your sound but don't want to bring a separate overdrive pedal. I dug the range I could achieve while working the circuit in tandem with the EQ, as I was able to muster everything from subtle grit to nasty lead tones. My only warning is to not get too taken with all the bells and whistles: Too much of a good thing can be bad, and with everything on the great tones can go away rather fast.

The Verdict

The Rootmaster RM-C112-220 is one of the more complete bass combos I've encountered—especially in this price range. Ashdown has jammed about 8 pounds of hammers into a 7-pound sack. And if you're just getting into effects like overdrive and compression, this amp could be a great place to try them out without having to shell out cash for extra devices. All said, the 220 will carry you from rehearsal to a small-venue gig with ease.

CLICK HERE TO WATCH A DEMO of this combo at premierguitar.com/jul2015

RATINGS

Ashdown Rootmaster RM-C112-220

$499 street
ashdownmusic.com

Tones	★★★★☆
Ease of use	★★★½☆
Build/Design	★★★★☆
Value	★★★★☆

PROS Great tonal range. Speaker and DI outs are mighty practical.

CONS Onboard effects sound good but could use more controllability.

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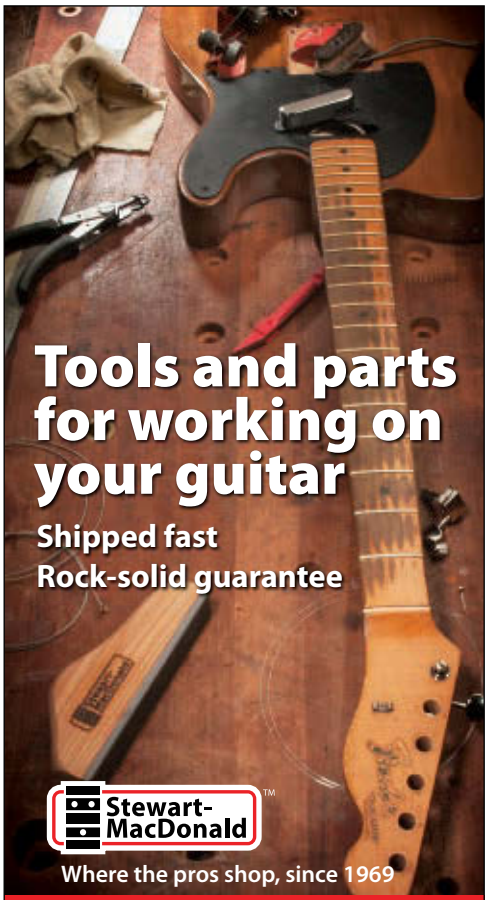

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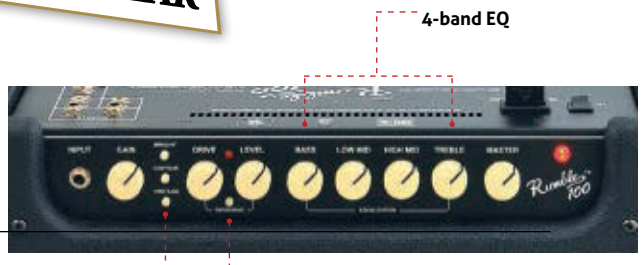

Introduced about a decade ago, Fender's Rumble line of combo amps was designed to offer power and portability at a reasonable price. True to form, the latest Rumble 100 provides all the tools a working bassist needs. It's compact yet authoritative, competitively priced, and it can veer from springtime sweet to winter brash with a few small adjustments.

To Rumble is Human

The Rumble 100's layout is one of the better I've seen on a combo amp. The front is dressed with Fender's vintage-sparkle grille cloth, and the controls are wisely situated on the back edge of the amp's top. (The ivory peanut-butter-cup knobs are a nice touch.) The only ornamentation is a simple Fender logo.

The control panel includes a gain control, three pushbutton tone presets (bright, contour, and vintage) and an overdrive section with drive and level controls. There's 4-band EQ (with low-mid and high-mid controls) and master volume. The rear panel hosts inputs and outputs and the power switch. There's effect send/return, a pair of 1/8" inputs (aux in and headphones), a jack for the optional footswitch, and an XLR out with ground-lift.

No Tumble, Just Rumble

The Rumble 100 is remarkably light—I could lift the 22-pound amp with a single finger. It earns top marks for portability.

Plugging in a '78 Fender P immediately yielded great tones. I started with the EQ flat, where the amp gave the truest representation of my bass. The EQ provides excellent tone shaping, and I really dug the low-mid control, because some rooms need more of these frequencies for the bass to cut through. Meanwhile, the single 12" Eminence speaker can handle everything the 100-watt amp can throw its way without loss of punch.

The real fun, though, was cycling through the pushbutton options. The vintage setting does the amp justice with a bottom-end bump that eases up the tone's warmth. It doesn't necessarily cop the sound of a particular vintage model, but such tones are always welcome from a combo. The contour setting provides modern slap-friendly tones that lent my passive P an active feel. The bright setting is akin to a clarity switch, bringing my bass to life with just the right dose of added highs. You can use the voicing buttons alone or in combination, which can be very effective with the overdrive.

Fender didn't equip the Rumble 100 with heavy overdrive, so you need a pedal for extreme tones. But the onboard overdrive breaks up the sound in just the right way, maintaining the integrity of the native bass tone. There's a perfect amount of grit, and when paired with the tone switches, it can work wonders for such a compact amp. Engaging the bright switch with the overdrive dimed lends a cool, shiny guitar-like presence. (Given the current trend of two-member bands, who needs a guitarist?)

The Verdict

Fender's Rumble 100 is a loud, smart combo that will make a nice fit in many a working bassist's arsenal. Such a wide range of tones is refreshing, as is the simple layout and modest overall weight. Yes, this combo is *definitely* ready to rumble.

CLICK HERE TO WATCH A DEMO of this combo at premierguitar.com/jul2015

RATINGS

Fender Rumble 100

$299 street
fender.com

Tones	★★★★½
Ease of use	★★★★½
Build/Design	★★★★½
Value	★★★★½

PROS Super portable. Great tones. XLR output.

CONS No tilt-back option.

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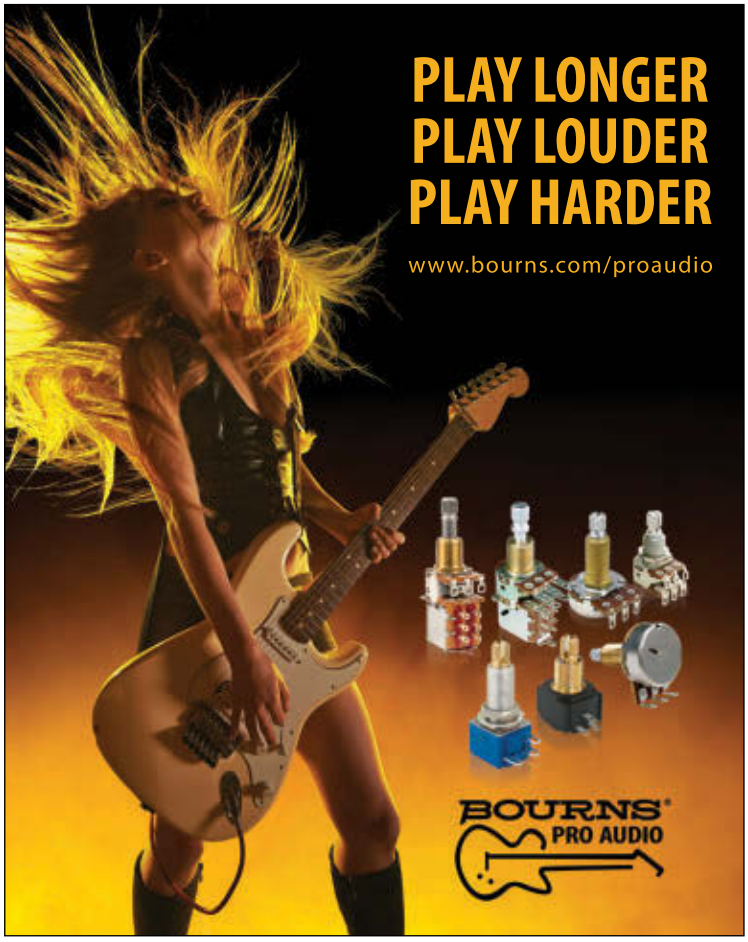
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Clip-On Tuners

Listening to an out-of-tune guitarist is like hearing fingernails on a chalkboard. Don't be that guitarist! There are many clip-on options for those who prefer their tuner close at hand, with myriad features, easy-to-read displays, and discreet profiles.

1
MEISEL
Magmount MM-10

You can secure this tuner to your headstock—or remove its clip and attach it to metal tuning machines using Magmount's integrated magnets.

$18 street

meiselaccessories.com

2
D'ADDARIO
PW-CT-10 NS

This headstock tuner for guitars, basses, and other stringed instruments uses a piezo sensor and features a large multi-color display for easy tuning in noisy and dimly lit situations.

$29 street

daddario.com

3
SNARK
SN-8

With a display that can rotate 360 degrees, this bright, easy-to-read tuner can accommodate left-handed players and unconventional instruments. Bonus: a built-in tap-tempo metronome.

$15 street

snarktuners.com

4
SAMSON
CT260V

This tuner features a vertical LCD display for smooth, realtime tuning verification, a dual 360-degree ball-joint clip for viewing at any angle, and an auto-on/off function.

$19 street

samsontech.com

5
BOSS
TU-10

This tuner has a multicolor display and features derived from other Boss tuners, including "Accu-Pitch" technology and "Stream" mode. It allows for lowered tunings of up to five semitones.

$29 street

bossus.com

6

7

8

9

10

6
ONBOARD RESEARCH
Intellitouch PT40
The PT40 ignores background noise through vibration-based tuning. It boasts a large, backlit display, and you can recharge its lithium-ion battery via the included USB cable.
$49 street
onboardresearch.com

7
KORG
Sledgehammer Pro
This tuner features an ultra-bright 3D display, calibration controls, and pitch-detection accuracy to a tenth of a cent.
$29 street
korg.com

8
KLIQ MUSIC GEAR
UberTuner
This tuner offers three points of adjustment for optimal visibility and a brightly backlit LED display.
$24 street
kliqmusicgear.com

9
PETERSON
StroboClip
Encased in a stainless-steel shell, this strobe tuner offers a bright HD display, 28 "Sweetener" presets, and 1/10-cent accuracy.
$79 street
petersontuners.com

10
GOGO
The Mini
This ultra-compact tuner stays out of the way while providing tuning accuracy to a half of a cent. The display boasts crisp resolution, large display fonts, and bright, two-color LEDs.
$14 street
gogotuners.com

Quick Hits

UAD MARSHALL

Plexi 1959 Amp Simulator

By Joe Gore

The new Marshall plexi plug-in from Universal Audio is one of the best amp simulations out there. Produced for UA by Softube with help from AC/DC engineer Tony Platt, it nails the iconic amp's signature sounds.

The core tones capture the "hollow" quality of a period-correct 4x12 cab and the "stinky" resonance of early Marshall overdrive. (The way distortion accumulates as you advance the volume controls feels particularly authentic.) You can choose from 12 input configurations (through each of the four virtual input jacks, or via every possible jumpered configuration). There's a submixer to blend, balance, and pan the sounds of various condenser, FET, dynamic, and ribbon mics. Unlike on some modelers, you can't adjust virtual mic positions. There are only three preset mic combinations, and only one virtual cabinet. But hey—better to have limited control over great sounds than great control over limited sounds.

The only weak links here are the anemic clean tones. But only sonic perverts give a hoot about clean plexi settings. (Guilty!) Most players come for the crunch, which Softube delivers in all its thumping and sizzling glory. One catch, though: Like all Universal Audio plug-ins, this one only runs on UAD systems such as Apollo and UAD-2 accelerator cards.

TEST GEAR *"Parts" Jazzmaster with Fralin P-92s, UAD Apollo Twin interface, Apple Logic Pro*

RATINGS

$199 street, uaudio.com

Tones	●●●●◐
Ease of Use	●●●●○
Build/Design	●●●●◐
Value	●●●●○

PROS Great-sounding virtual plexi. Twelve input settings. Savvy mic combinations. Built-in submixer.

CONS For UAD systems only. Weak clean tones (like anyone cares).

CLICK HERE TO HERE *this simulator at premierguitar.com/jul2015*

A&E CRAFT

Ultima Capo

By Charles Saufley

For my money, trigger capos are a little bit of magic. They make changes fast and easy on stage and facilitate experiments when you're in the midst of writing and practicing. A&E craft's new Ultima capo doesn't radically re-write the trigger capo rules, but it's a solid performer.

The internal spring action is very smooth. And the extra length and rubber grip on the upper hand give you a little extra leverage a steady handle on the capo as well. The Ultima has a grip like an angry gorilla. I used it to capo my Danelectro 12-string at the seventh fret and didn't hear a single rattling or muted string—remarkable given the relatively high action and the fact that a few go-to capos in my collection have failed at the same task. If you use a guitar with jumbo frets, the Ultima's heavy squeezing action can result in sharp intonation. And the width of the section that contacts the strings is a little bit shorter than some competing capos: limiting if you have wide neck or capo much higher than the seventh fret. Overall, though, it's a sturdy, light, and fairly priced capo alternative.

TEST GEAR *Danelectro Hodad 12, Fender Stratocaster "E" Series, Rickenbacker 330, Martin 00-15, Gibson J-45, Taylor 214ce*

RATINGS

$12 street, aecraft.rocks

Ease of Use	●●●●●
Build/Design	●●●●◐
Value	●●●●◐

PROS Smooth action. Tight grip. Nice ergonomics.

CONS Tight grip can mess with intonation on jumbo-fretted guitars. Length of capo arm may be too short for wide-necked guitars and high fret positions. Online-only sales make it tough to replace a lost Ultima on tour.

SEYMOUR DUNCAN

805

By Jason Shadrick

The latest stomp from famed pickup guru Seymour Duncan is the 805, an updated take on the ubiquitous green pedal that's launched a million riffs. Duncan started with the "808 chip," which was a full-sized 4558, but they settled on a MC33178 to eliminate excess noise and extend battery life. They also added in a very responsive 3-band EQ and some added gain. The end result is aimed at Tube Screamer fans that like more tone-shaping power.

With all knobs at noon, the 805 captured the essence of a classic overdrive—think "Jumping Jack Flash" with more girth. Set up as a boost, the 805 isn't quite as transparent as I hoped, probably due to the active EQ's amplification stage. The real surprise came when the gain was cranked. The 805 produced an amazingly crunchy metal tone (it does have 36 dB of gain handy) and with the added EQ controls I could dial out some of flabby low end and scoop the mids—bonus! There inevitability will be the die-hard 808 nerds that wouldn't give up their green box for all the Klons in the world, but the 805 gives open-minded overdrive fans a solid, and versatile, option.

TEST GEAR *Fender Stratocaster, PRS S2 Vela, Fender Hot Rod Deville ML 212*

RATINGS

$140 street, seymourduncan.com

Tones	♥♥♥♥♡
Ease of Use	♥♥♥½♡
Build/Design	♥♥♥♥♡
Value	♥♥♥♥♡

PROS Very interactive EQ controls. Covers a lot of ground.

CONS Could be more transparent at lower gain settings.

CLICK HERE TO HEAR *this pedal at premierguitar.com/jul2015*

KALA

5-String SUB U-Bass

By Rich Osweiler

Kala's U-Basses have proven that tiny instruments can produce big tones. But adding a 5th string to a 21"-scale bass? I was skeptical—until I tried the new 5-string SUB U-Bass.

Playing a U-Bass, with its thick, floppy polyurethane strings and tight fret spacing, takes getting used to. But after becoming acquainted and plugging in, I encountered warm, woody, upright-like tones via this little red monster's passive piezo saddle pickup and 2-band active EQ (both manufactured by Shadow). Working the 5th string revealed no buzzing or muddiness, and I had fun across the 'board. (Yes, playing above the 12th fret requires thin and nimble fingers, but the money notes don't live up there anyway.)

Keep your pick in your pocket, keep your attack in check, don't plan on bends given the DNA of the strings, and slappers should steer clear. But its über-deep tones are astounding given the instrument's size. This is no toy—it's a great low-end tool that delivers spacious upright-esque sounds in a well-made and easy-to-tote package.

TEST GEAR *Gallien-Krueger 800RB head, TC Electronic RS410 cab*

RATINGS

$499 street, ubass.com

Tones	♥♥♥♥♡
Ease of Use	♥♥♥♡♡
Build/Design	♥♥♥♥♡
Value	♥♥♥½♡

PROS Big tones. Upright-like sounds from a tiny body.

CONS The feel takes some getting used to. Tight quarters require mindfulness to avoid brushing or bumping the sensitive piezo.

CLICK HERE TO HEAR *this bass at premierguitar.com/jul2015*

FENDER Stratocaster HSS Shawbucker

By Ted Drozdowski

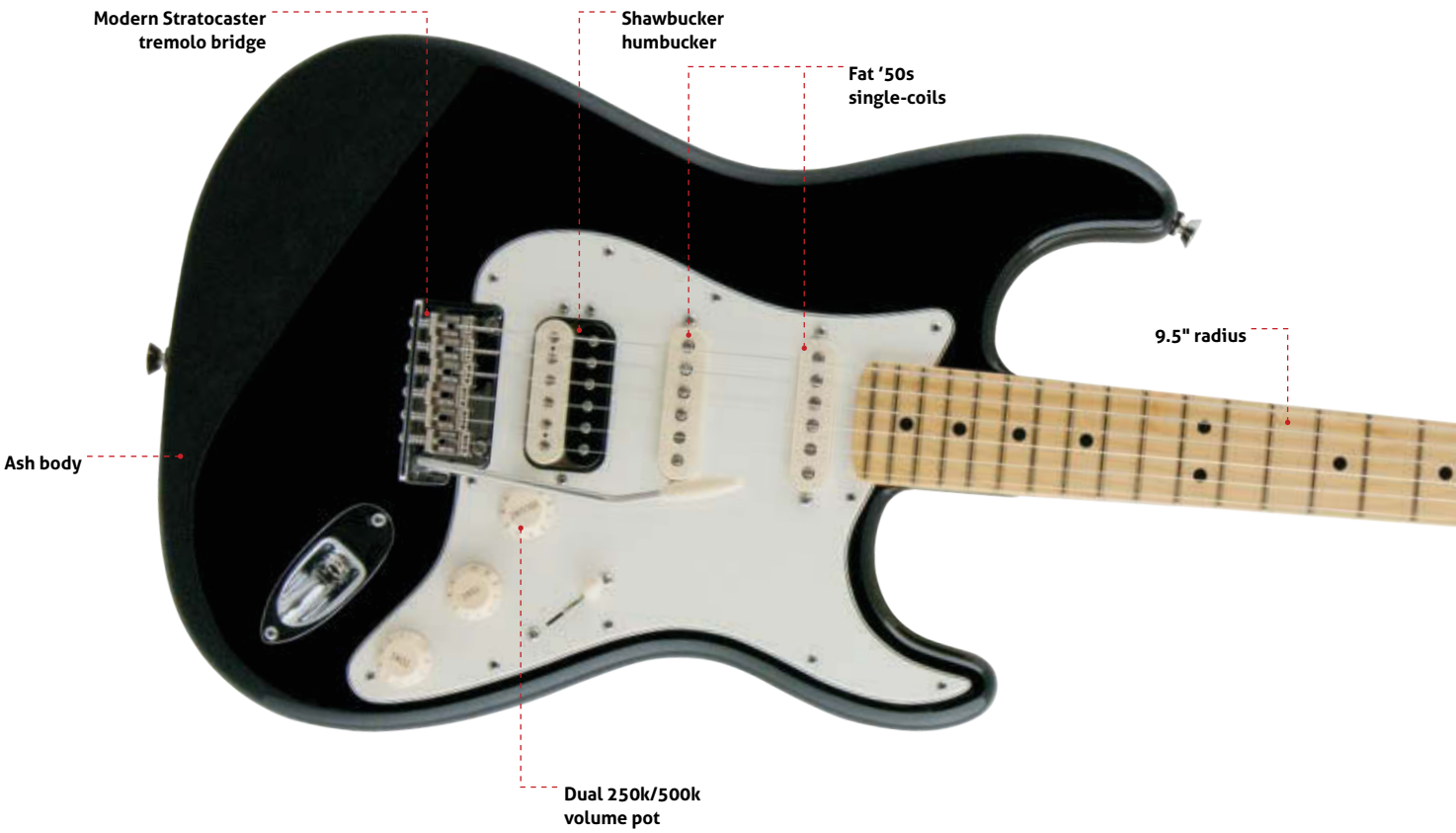
The sonic versatility of guitars with both single coil and humbucking pickups appeals to tone hunters. Moving from the clean slice of the former to the warm growl of the latter is a quick and easy way to make amps and pedals speak in different dialects.

Enter the American Standard Stratocaster HSS Shawbucker, a formidable beast with a bridge humbucker and two single-coils. Fender pickup guru Tim Shaw designed the humbucker with an ear toward bold vintage tones, and there's plenty of bite *and* bark in this zebra-colored critter.

Pickup Artist

Although Shaw's been at Fender for 20 years—and is comfortable in *every* facet of the guitar-building business—he started out as an apprentice to famed pickup designer Bill Lawrence before working at Gibson R&D. His Shawbucker is inspired by Seth Lover's original PAF—and it kicks butt. Like '50s originals, it's unpotted—that is, not dipped in wax like most modern 'buckers. It's also relatively low-output, like original PAFs.

But Shaw adds a cool non-historic detail: an automatic dual-pot volume control. Kick in the Shawbucker and the pot runs at



a bright 500k for full spank and breathy articulation. But when the humbucker is switched off, the control operates at Fender's traditional 250k value.

Wood and Mettle

The HSS Shawbucker delivers pretty much what you'd expect from a well-made American Standard Strat: the classic contoured looks, a vintage-feeling neck, and durable hardware. Our test model has a comfortably thin C-profile maple neck, a 9.5" fretboard, and medium jumbo frets. The light, comfy body is ash.

Our test guitar arrived in dapper black, though the model is available in five polyurethane finishes. It includes Fender's newly upgraded tremolo bridge featuring bent-steel saddles and a copper-infused block that allegedly provides greater sustain and more fluid bar action. I couldn't tell whether it accomplishes those missions, but at first, using the bar—even slightly—consistently knocked the guitar out of tune, though tightening the two screws that secure the bridge assembly to the body cured that pronto.

Another nice touch: staggered tuning posts. They descend in height from the low E to high E, increasing the strings' break angle over the nut. This supposedly improves performance and eliminates buzz, though it won't counter a poor set-up. The guitar's strings were so close to the fretboard when it arrived that the low E and A strings buzzed slightly along most of the neck. That's no deal-breaker though—a pro setup could quickly cure this problem.

Amped Up

Since Shaw's mission was vintage tones, I plugged into vintage amps: a 1966 Fender Twin, a 1972 Marshall Super Lead, and a mid-'90s Mesa-Boogie Dual Rectifier Tremo-Verb. Buzzing strings aside, I was smitten, especially by the ultra-responsive Shawbucker.

In the bridge-only position, chords and notes seemed to jump from the Twin's speakers before relaxing into a rich, airy bloom. Unlike most conventional Strats with single-coil bridge pickups, there was no ear-stabbing shrillness, even at bright settings. Tones were rich, powerful, and cutting. Meanwhile, the single-coil sounds provided traditional Strat-thenticity.

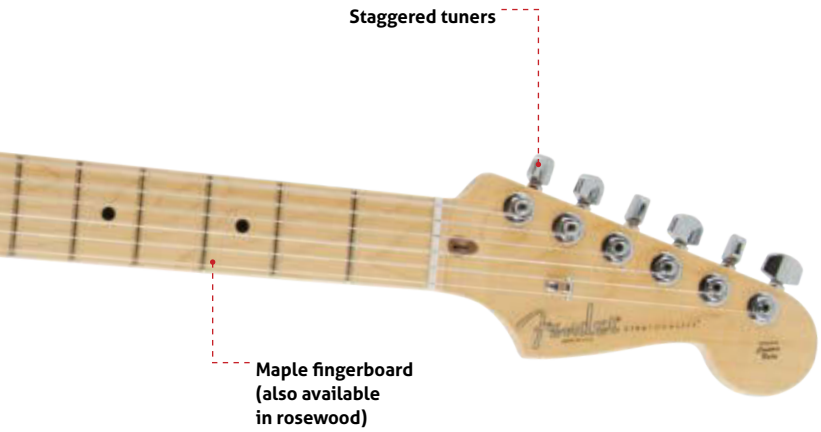
Through the Mesa driving a 12" Eminence Private Jack 50-watt speaker with all controls straight up, tones were warmer, with increased sustain and power. The overall sound was more harmonically generous than that from the Twin, with nicely developing sonic trails.

But the biggest thrill was the Super Lead pumping into a 1x12 Ted Weber 60-watt speaker cabinet. The warm amp tone complemented the Shawbucker's bright top end and emphasized its beautiful midrange. There was a wonderful palette of overtones and absolutely killer sustain. Talk about vintage tone! This was the Wayback Machine set to 1969 for a perfect mating of Marshall and humbucker—it's a marriage the Shawbucker seems meant for.

The Verdict

The American Standard Stratocaster HSS Shawbucker is more than your average Strat. It's versatile, articulate, and highly playable. Notes and chords come through loud and clear, with a sweet harmonic profile. The Tim Shaw humbucker is a classy-sounding pickup with full-bodied midrange and enough brightness to cut through in any band, minus the potential knife-edge tones that bridge single-coils can produce. This guitar rocks!

CLICK HERE TO WATCH A DEMO of this guitar at premierguitar.com/jul2015



RATINGS

Fender American Standard Stratocaster HSS Shawbucker

$1,299 street
fender.com

Tones	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★½
Build/Design	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★

PROS Great vintage tones. Traditional look. Great playability. Affordable.

CONS Poor setup on test guitar.

ORANGE
Rockerverb 50 MKIII

By Matthew Holliman

Orange amplifiers have long attracted the worship of high-gain freaks. Yes, the amps' show-stealing visuals make them objects of desire among a wide cross section of players (not to mention great stage dressing), but it's the massive, gooey crunch that keeps heavy players crawling to Orange like ants to the sugar jar.

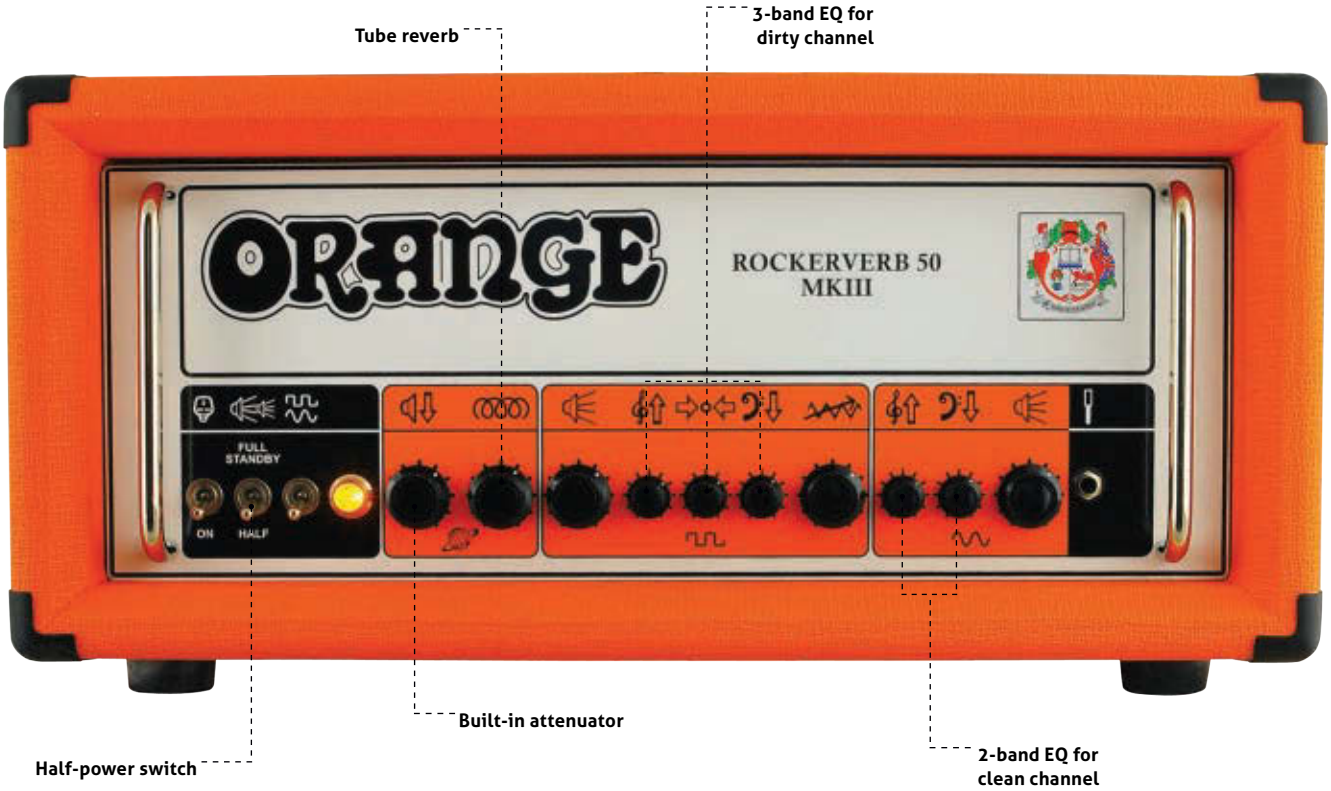
In 2003 Orange launched their Rockerverb series—versatile dual-channel heads with reverb and effect loops. The third incarnation, reviewed here, is the 50-watt Rockerverb MKIII, a muscular mid-powered head with improved reverb and scalable power.

Orange On Orange

The Rockerverb is about the same size as most full-sized Orange heads (21.65" x 10.63" x 11.02") and weighs in just shy of 46 lbs. (20.75 kg). The face is adorned with the no-text graphic labels that Orange introduced in the '70s. These icons can be confusing for the uninitiated, but they're intuitive enough once you learn their functions.

A 12AT7/ECC81 tube and a custom transformer drive the improved reverb circuit. Another new feature is a built-in attenuator located after the master volume, providing additional control over how the Rockerverb distorts after the preamp stage. It's a handy feature for playing at home or on smaller stages, helping retain the push/pull dynamic of high-end gain at lower levels. You can also halve the power to 25 watts via a faceplate switch.

The sturdy chassis houses a preamp section driven by four ECC83/12AX7s and two ECC81/AT7s. There are two EL34s in the power section, while a single 12AT7/ECC81 buffers the effect loop. There's 3-band EQ for the dirty channel, and 2-band for the clean channel, marking a return to the Rockerverb MK1 configuration (MK IIs have 3-band EQ for both channels). The speaker output can be set for 8 ohms, 16 ohms, or two 16-ohm cabs.



High-Gain Classic with New Tricks

I'm an Orange owner familiar with the Rockerverb series after years of touring with 50- and 100-watt MKIIs. I generally set these completely clean with a small dose of reverb, with a bunch of pedals at the front end. I did the same with the MKIII, running the head through a 4x12 with Celestion V30s.

At full power and with the attenuator disengaged, the MKIII's ample headroom works well as a pedal platform. My Stratocaster sounded crisp, bright, and airy with the EQ controls at noon, and pick attack felt super-immediate. At times I found myself yearning for the MKII's mid control, especially when I got around to playing in the context of a full, raging band. For the most part, there's enough presence to get out in front of a band, though it would be faster and easier with a dedicated mid control.

However, the footswitchable attenuator offsets some of that lost flexibility. You can, for example, set up a clean boost if you turn the circuit off with the attenuator threshold set higher than the master volume. (Be careful, though—too much attenuation can throw a wet blanket over your sound, especially if you run the MKIII at half power.) You can also use the attenuator on the dirty channel as a secondary master volume or third channel.

For many players, the dirty channel is the Rockerverb highlight. Running a Gibson Les Paul straight into the head was an illuminating experience. In fact, just about any guitar with decent humbuckers can make you grin like a fool when you push the gain past noon. The distortion sounds spacious, with little of the compression you get from fuzz-based gain. Touch sensitivity is excellent.

The gain control puts many overdrive flavors at your fingertips. Settings between 10 to 12 o'clock are perfect for hard rock riffage and Angus Young leads. Twist the gain up to 3 o'clock and you'll discover why Orange amps are so popular with the metal crowd: Tones are rich, gigantic, and touch-responsive. What's doubly remarkable is how much the Rockerverb loves pedals at these high gain levels. Turning on my '80s RAT or an EarthQuaker Devices Hoof added discernibly different flavors of crunch to chords and character to leads, but the MKIII never sounded overloaded or excessively compressed.

I've always liked Rockerverb MKIIs for backline partly because of their onboard reverb. The effect didn't sound fantastic, but it let me ditch a reverb pedal. Fortunately, the Mark III's reverb is deeper and more full-bodied than its predecessor. You can generate longer trails, and the effect seems less prone to feedback. While the circuit lacks the range and depth of a big Fender tank, it's a major improvement.

The Verdict

Orange amplifiers are rather expensive, and at just under $2,000, the Rockerverb MKIII is no exception. The good news is that the MKIII covers much ground for that money. Its scalable power and attenuator mean it won't be overkill in a club, and at full power the amp is an absolute monster. It's also an excellent pedal platform on both channels—a rarity among high-gain heads. In an amp category full of one-trick ponies, the Rockerverb MKIII stands as a versatile jack-of-all-trades.

CLICK HERE TO WATCH A DEMO of this amp at premierguitar.com/jul2015

RATINGS

Orange Amplification Rockerverb 50 MKIII

$1,999 street
orangeamps.com

Tones	★★★★☆
Ease of use	★★★★½
Build/Design	★★★★☆
Value	★★★★☆

PROS Beautifully versatile. Improved reverb. Pedal-friendly.

CONS Attenuator can muffle clean output.

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GURUS Echosex 2

By Alex Maiolo

When it comes to design, we often think of German precision, no-nonsense American pragmatism, and the form-follows-function economy of Scandinavians. Part of the charm of Italian design, though, is often an endearing eccentricity, as found in everything from the Vespa scooter to the Bialetti espresso pot—or that lesser-known Italian classic, the Binson Echorec.

How fitting that engineer Bonfiglio Bini created the Echorec in Milan, a city long associated with design. Back in the '60s, while most delay designers focused on tape as a medium, Bini concluded that a magnetic drum would be considerably less fragile. Result: an echo unit that played and sounded unlike any other. The Echorec became an integral sound for both Barrett- and Gilmour-era Floyd, and Jimmy Page applied it to John Bonham's drums on "When The Levee Breaks."

The drive to capture that sound in a stompbox has bordered on the religious. One recent attempt is the Echosex 2 from Italian builder Gurus. It's as Italian as Lucio Battisti driving a Fiat 500 through Umbria.

Ciao, Bellissimo

Some of us have a have a near-biological reaction when we encounter mythic gear. Indeed, after unboxing the Echosex, I felt like I needed a cold shower. The etching, Perspex faceplate, and overall layout are nods to original Binsons, and I love how Gurus retained the imperfect English labels. LEDs surrounding a 12AX7 preamp tube glow brighter as input increases—a reference to the "magic eye" indicator on the originals. The actual delays, however, are produced via a digital PT2399 chip, with post-delay filtering to mimic the sound of tape heads.

The layout is clean: On the top row are controls for bass/treble, "age of damage," and volume echo (dry/wet mix). Lower-row knobs control length of swell (feedback) and echo (time in ms.) To the side are DIP switches to choose the bypass mode (hard cutoff or spillover) and to set the input level for line or guitar. (Like the original Echorec, the Echosex 2 can sere as both stompbox and outboard studio effect/preamp.)

We tend to focus on how many pedals we can cram onto our boards. But sometimes it's nice to remember how much we can do with a few big, beautiful, boxes. There's something wonderful about big knobs and script you can see without a magnifying glass.

Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun

The Echosex 2 is about as plug-and-play as it gets. The only reason to read to manual is to make sure the DIP switches are set appropriately. I grabbed a Fender Telecaster Standard and Vox AC15 to test the Echosex 2 (plus an Acid Fuzz Sonic Boom to see how the device would respond to a period-perfect fuzz). Naturally, I dove straight into the "damaged" settings. Part of the Echorec's charm has to do with the way its capstan can become misshapen over time, producing an effect similar to tape warble. The Echosex nails this.

The Echosex controls are beautifully interactive. For example, you can sculpt self-oscillating feedback via the bass/treble knob, which not only makes feedback tones brighter or darker, but also fine-tunes the point at which repeats self-oscillate.

Off with Their Heads!

However, the Echosex 2 omits one key feature from the original Echorec: multi-head effects. Echorecs had several playback heads

capable of beautiful, disorienting delays. It's hard to understand why anyone would spend the time to get so many details perfect, but neglect this signature feature. At this price, it's frustrating.

Beyond that glaring omission, the Echosex excels at conjuring the Echorec magic. With the feedback and tone controls set just right, guitar lines can generate super-long repeat trails, darkly mysterious delay washes, and bright, articulate repeats that can rise above cluttered arrangements. The tone control is even more effective with a fuzz engaged. Adding warble with the "Damage" control gives repeats a cool EMI/Abbey Road-style "artificial double-tracking" effect. With volume echo 100 percent wet, I was reminded how extreme classic echo can be. That said, subtler settings function much like those on any other great-sounding faux-analog delay.

Period technology limited the original Echorec to 300ms delays, but the digital Echosex 2 provides 660ms. The extra time is useful for layering parts, though it sometimes highlights the absence of a multi-tap option. You can create soundscapes not possible with an Echorec, yet true to its sonic spirit.

The Verdict

Visually and sonically, Gurus has done something wonderful. You could get to roughly the same place—at roughly half the cost—with some of the better recent Echorec-inspired stomps, but you can also opt for Converse sneakers over custom-made boots. The Echosex 2's unique, bespoke quality is uncommon even among even the best-built boxes, making the pedal a delight to work with.

While it's tough enough for touring, the Echosex 2 may be most inspirational in the studio. With its line-level option, it could serve well as an outboard effect, treating guitars, other instruments, or entire mixes. The Gurus Echosex 2 is a real asset for the resourceful player—and a beautiful piece of hardware that might render much of your pedalboard redundant.

CLICK HERE TO HEAR this pedal at premierguitar.com/jul2015

RATINGS

Gurus Amps Echosex 2

$409 street
gurusamps.it

Tones	★★★★½
Ease of Use	★★★★★
Build/Design	★★★★★
Value	★★½☆☆

PROS Beautifully authentic Echorec sounds. Lovingly made. Awesome studio effect.

CONS Omits the original Echorec's multi-head effects.

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DREAM STUDIOS M5

By Jon D'Auria

Former BMX racer turned guitar designer Bill Ryan and his company Dream Studios recently unveiled a fifth model to their collection of basses with the vintage-vibed M5. It's a 5-string version of the SoCal company's Maverick bass, which itself was spawned from their guitar model that bears the same name.

Dreamweaver

My first impression of the 8 1/2-pound M5 was that of a solid and sturdy bass without the bulky weight that can burden other models in its class—especially 5-strings. With an offset body crafted from one piece of 1.75"-thick swamp ash, a bolt-on hard-maple neck topped with a rosewood fretboard and 22 jumbo frets, and a Hipshot Vintage bridge, the 34"-scale bass boasts excellent materials and construction.

Perhaps the most thoughtful elements of the body design are the contours and curves that give the M5 a comfortable shape that naturally fits the body when worn at most any height. (One would be hard-pressed to not recognize the M5's similarity to Kurt Cobain's Jag Stang.) The sexy curvature at the top of the bass makes for comfy arm placement and elbow relief, whether you're employing finger, pick, or slap techniques. Another body detail worth mentioning is the placement of the output jack: It's located in a recessed cutout in the back of the bass, which keeps the cable firmly in place and out of the way.

With its two volume knobs, a balance knob, and a tone control, the M5 offers plenty of versatility and sound-shaping power. Two Seymour Duncan alnico SMB5-a humbuckers deliver an array of both active and passive tones. Speaking of, the standout feature of the M5's electronics is the pair of active/passive slide switches located on the pickguard near the upper horn. Yes, a player can switch between passive and active modes, but can also run the two pickups in different individual modes. (More on this shortly.)

Maverick Sound

I plugged the M5 into an Ampeg SVT and matching 8x10 rig with both pickups in active mode, the volumes wide open, pickup

balance equal, and the tone knob dialed to about 75 percent. The bass produced a booming low-end with great clarity and a powerful midrange punch. The high end was tremendously bright and clear, and while quite pronounced, it balanced nicely with the girth of the low and mids. The M5 is sonically pummeling at intense volume levels and the 5th string's low registers held an impressively strong and bright sustain.

Compared to an active Music Man StingRay, the M5's booming resonance contains less metallic mids, but its punch still sounds severe enough to cut through any mix. The M5 probably sounds closer to a Fender Jag, though I found that the M5 growled more. It has a distinct bite, and that bodes well for metal or alternative music.

Engaging only the neck pickup and playing fingerstyle directly above it yielded a full tone with round highs in the upper registers. I preferred using a pick and playing back towards the bridge with the bridge pickup soloed. The resulting treble tones proved to be spot-on for faster punk and rock lines.

When I switched both pickups to passive—again balanced evenly—the tones took on an expected character change. There is still quite a rumble, but the brightness is cut significantly. The passive mode produces more of a thumping effect than the wall of sound generated by its active alter ego. This made it my preferred setting when I wanted to slap and pop, though some might prefer the hotter active tone in this context.

In passive mode, the M5 can deliver a vintage R&B thump (I found myself gravitating to the 3rd and 4th strings and playing between the 3rd and 9th positions with a muted plucking technique), but it can also conjure alternative flavors if you use a flatpick or aggressive fingerpicking. The tone knob covers a pretty wide sonic range, but my favorite sounds were with it dimed.

The Dream Factor

The M5 lets you individually select whether each pickup is in passive or active mode, and this opens up many more tone-manipulation options. Collaborating with the crew at Seymour Duncan, Dream Studios spent months designing the electronic circuitry to be able to make this work effectively. The upper-horn slide switches *could* be inadvertently grazed if you're not paying attention, but their location makes it quick and easy to make adjustments on the fly.

I spent some time going through different active/passive pickup configurations to see how the M5 would respond when I played in various registers and used different hand positions. One cool application is playing in a reggae/dub style with an active neck pickup and passive bridge pickup. Working the 4th and 5th strings closer to the fretboard, I got a deeply rumbling modern dub tone. Picking back toward the bridge pickup instantly turned this into more of a vintage dub sound. I generally found myself engaging both pickups in the same mode, but having this split-mode functionality is a bonus, especially for finding unique tones in the studio.

The Verdict

If you're in the market for a sexy looking 5-string with a diverse set of tone options and customizable sound, the M5 is worthy of a meeting. At a few clicks under a couple grand, it's not inexpensive, but it's priced fairly considering its build, DNA, and playing comfort level. Whether you kick it fully into active mode, crank the EQ, and push the volume while ripping some aggressive picking, or switch to passive mode and groove out with some satisfying thumb plucking, the M5 has you covered—and then some.

CLICK HERE TO HEAR this bass at premierguitar.com/jul2015

RATINGS

Dream Studios M5

$1,849 street
dreamstudioguitars.com

Tones	★★★★☆
Playability	★★★★☆
Build/Design	★★★½
Value	★★★★☆

PROS Excellent construction. Booming tone and a large sonic palette. Ergonomic design with recessed output jack.

CONS Pickup switches can get in the way, depending on player's style. Occasional crackling noise from active/passive switch.

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WREN AND CUFF
Gold Comp

By Charles Saufley

Describing the merits of germanium transistors can turn a casual gear nerd into a tongue-tied mess. Explaining compression's advantages is an even faster way to transform a player into a mumbling, stumbling gob of goo. Which may make Wren and Cuff's Germanium Gold Comp one of the most difficult-to-describe effects ever.

But no matter how you describe it, the Gold Comp is a marvelous sounding thing—a sometime magical tone masseuse that lends body and control to distortion/fuzz tones and airy-sounding compression to clean ones. And it works better as a clean boost than most dedicated clean boosts.

Smooth Moves

Given Wren and Cuff's fine reputation as a fuzz builder (their Big Muff clones *kill*) it's no surprise that the Gold Comp circuit looks sort of fuzz-like. Two germanium transistors hover prominently over the circuit board. One is dedicated to the compression effect, while the other drives a post-comp amp that's one of the keys to the pedal's flexible and agreeable personality.

The Gold Comp is very quiet—except for the bypass switch, which sometimes pops during switching. (Wren and Cuff decided that the benefits of mechanical bypass were worth the occasional racket.) My low-volume sessions (where I'm *very* likely to use a compressor) suggest that this could be a distraction in quiet settings, but anyone using the pedal with a loud band is unlikely to notice.

Strong and Subtle Squeeze—Simultaneously

There's nothing tricky about using the Gold Comp. Getting great sounds can be as easy as plugging in and setting the level. It does classic compressor chores with aplomb—it's a clucking country picker's dream. Individual notes acquire percussive heft and harmonic evenness amid fast-fingered fretboard dashes.

But exploring and appreciating the Gold Comp's subtleties requires a little concentration. Like a germanium fuzz, the Gold Comp is extremely dynamic. It's highly responsive to guitar volume changes, especially when the pedal's volume, compression, and attack/release controls are set high. Adjusting your guitar's volume at these settings can clean up your signal or add grit and gain. (There's a lot of extra boost on tap.) You can also reshape the compression in cool ways, from soft contours to thick, near-claustrophobic squeeze. The Gold Comp responds to changing input levels with a nuanced, natural-sounding curve.

I tend to use compression with small tube amps (and cheap solid-state ones) to generate clean sustain at low volume. The Gold Comp is one the sweetest-toned paths to this sound I've ever worked with. Clean, Richard Thompson-like flurries of hammer-ons and bends were fluid, sonorous, and lyrical, making my Champ sound and feel more like an old tweed Deluxe. Snappy Nile Rodgers/Prince-style funk riffs were equally exquisite and sassy.

Dedicated attack and release controls

Germanium transistors in compression and boost circuits

Tricks for Trips and Dirty Licks

As an avowed disciple of granny-shades-era Roger McGuinn, I love aggressive compression on 12-string electrics. To approximate his double-squashed, ultra-sustained '66 tones (and generate the volume and presence I need when performing with a live band), I typically use an old Boss CS-3. While the Gold Comp doesn't quite deliver the Boss's surreal super-squish, I got close by maxing the attack, release, and compression. While the Wren And Cuff lacks some of the odd studio artificiality I love for those Byrds licks, many will prefer the Gold Comp's airy, open-ended chime. (Don't even get me started on the glory of double-compressing with the CS-3 and the Gold Comp, which took my Rickenbacker and me to pseudo-raga heaven.)

McGuinn wasn't the only killer "B" to use crushing compression to intoxicating ends. I lust equally for George and John's swirling, vari-speeded *Revolver*-era sounds ("Rain, ""She

Said, She Said"). The Wren and Cuff approximates those swooshing, Fairchild-crushed tones beautifully if you use modest release times, hot volume settings, and a touch of bright overdrive or low-gain germanium fuzz.

Wren and Cuff touts the Gold Comp's ability to massage dirty sounds, and it's no lie. I tried the comp after my original Rat 2—a potentially unruly pedal that generates killer grinding chords, but can be scathingly spiky in the high frequencies. With Wren and Cuff's suggested post-dirt-box settings (plus a little extra volume bump) the Gold Comp smoothed the most ear-lacerating peaks without sacrificing harmonics or muscle. (Actually, I sensed even more muscle that before.) It's a perfect setup for layering punky, hard rock rhythm tracks. In fact, it was difficult *not* to think about Butch Vig's wall-of-sound rhythm production on Nirvana's *Nevermind* and Sonic Youth's *Goo*.

The same settings were equally magical on fuzzy leads. A MkIII Tonebender clone took on much of the brawny clout of a Big Muff without sacrificing its toothy presence. Placed after a less gainy Mk 1 Tonebender clone (with my guitar volume halfway down) the Gold Comp turned a thin, crispy, sub-fuzz tone into beautifully heavy and bass-rich crunch. I wouldn't hesitate to use the setting for Neil Young or Dinosaur Jr.-flavored leads and arpeggios.

The Verdict

Wren and Cuff's Gold Comp is a powerful little box. It's a formidable preamp and clean boost. It feels and sounds exceptionally natural. Its compression curve is nuanced and classy. Whether you use the pedal in classic compression applications or to more in-your-face or psychedelic ends, it provides a wonderfully forgiving musicality. The Gold Comp may cost a few bucks more than most stompbox compressors, but you may find that you rarely, if ever, turn it off.

PREMIERGuitar PREMIER GEAR

CLICK HERE TO WATCH A DEMO of this pedal at premierguitar.com/jul2015

RATINGS

Wren and Cuff Gold Comp

$244 street
wrenandcuff.com

Tones	★★★★★
Ease of Use	★★★★★
Build/Design	★★★★½
Value	★★★½☆

PROS Great dynamic response. Lovely, organic-sounding compression curve. Superb clean boost. Lots of headroom.

CONS Mechanical bypass can be noisy.

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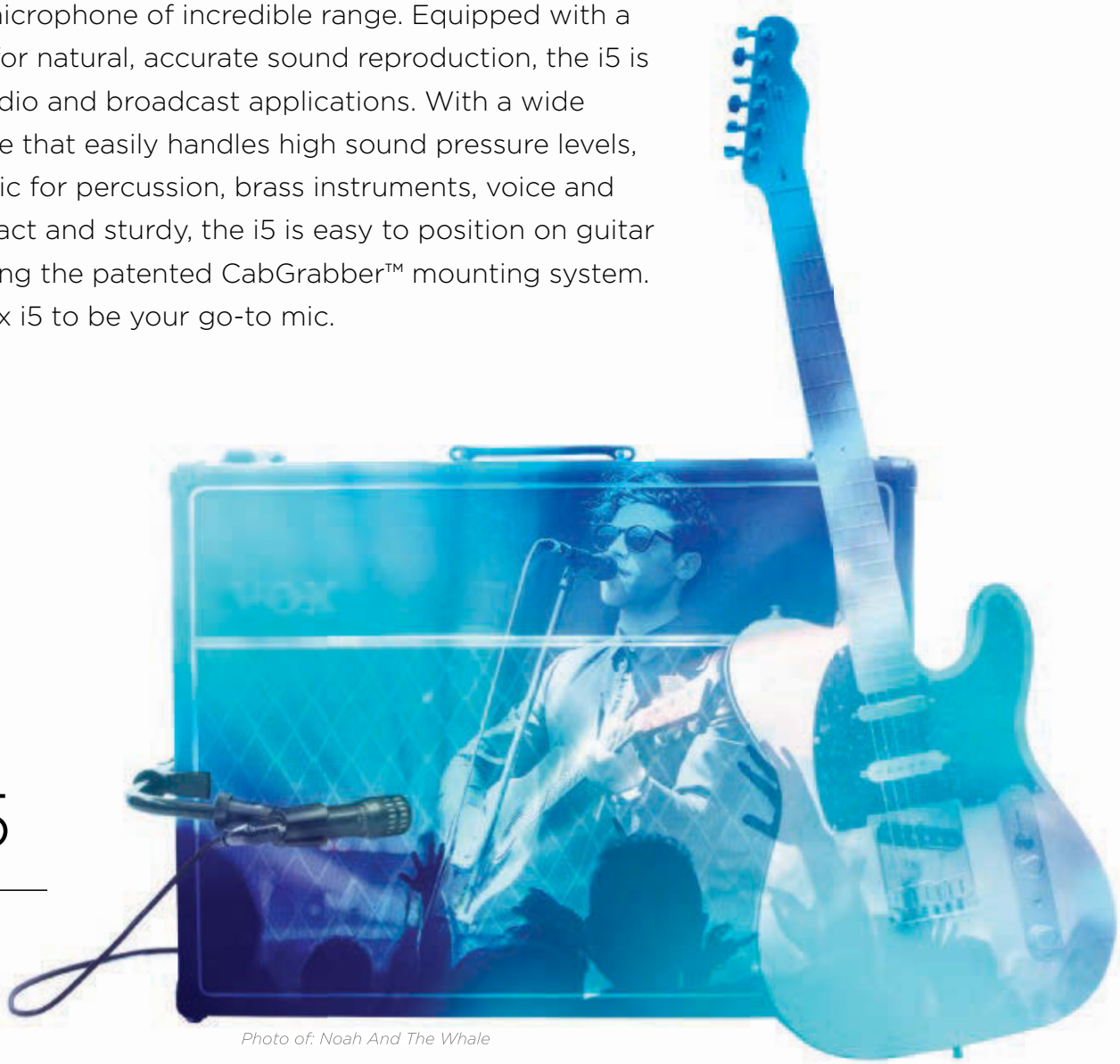

Photo of: Noah And The Whale

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Question & Obsession

There's always more than one way to approach a tune. This month guitarist Adam Levy joins PG *editors and our Reader of the Month to discuss cover songs we prefer over the originals.*

Q: *Name a cover tune you think outshines the original.*

Photo by Ellen Rehak

Adam Levy
Guest Picker

A: This may seem sacrilegious, as we recently lost the great singer Ben E. King—who wrote and first recorded this song in '61—but John Lennon's '74 cover of "Stand by Me" trumps King's for me. Deep groove, righteous vocal. The instrumental section features two guitar solos at once. It should be a mess but it's glorious, thanks to Jesse Ed Davis' magic touch.

Current obsession:
Miles Okazaki's new book *Fundamentals of Guitar*. Much of it is esoteric, considering the f-word in the title, yet Okazaki addresses some of the real nuts and bolts of playing tonal—and not-so-tonal—music. This book inspires me and sometimes makes me question everything I think I know about the guitar.

Daniel Palmqvist
Reader of the Month

A: I think First Aid Kit's version of Simon & Garfunkel's "America" is just beautiful. I like many styles of music, even though I'm a rock/metal guy at heart. To me this performance is simply pure music, no cool riffs or flashy guitar solos, just acoustic instruments, a great song with fantastic vocals.

Current obsession:
Right now I'm trying to get comfortable playing my 7-string electric. I guess I'm 20 years late to start playing a 7-string since 8 or 9 strings seems to be the rage now, but 7 is heavy enough for my taste.

Perry Bean
Video Editor

A: Ryan Adams covering "Wasted Years" by Iron Maiden. Turning a metal song into a tender love ballad can't be easy, but Adams absolutely reinvents this one.

Current obsession:
Throwback shoegaze-y post hardcore. Quite a few bands are doing this now, and a few are killing it! Don't believe me? Check out a band called Citizen.

Tessa Jeffers
Managing Editor

A: Kings of Leon's interpretation of Swedish pop goddess Robyn's "Dancing on My Own" blows me away. Haunting guitar replaces synth, the melody is slowed, and they turn it into something vulnerable and sad, but beautiful. And lots of well-placed bends!

Current obsession:
Since I can't stop singing this, it must be Shakey Graves, "Dearly Departed." His duet with Esmé Patterson is a wonderful recipe: ghosts, fantastic harmony, a lovers' quarrel, catchy phrasing, flirting, soul, and a whole lot of rhythm.

Rich Osweiler
Associate Editor

A: My friend and fellow editor Charlie Saufley will probably stop talking to me after this. Don't get me wrong: I love the Kinks and everything about the legendary "You Really Got Me," but the boys from Pasadena and their nitrous-fueled rendition leaves the former at the starting line.

Current obsession:
Blast-from-the-past reunions. I've seen some unfortunate performances by greats that might want to hang it up, but recently I saw Sleater-Kinney, the Replacements, and the Juliana Hatfield Three ripping it up as well or better than they did 20 years ago. Rock on!

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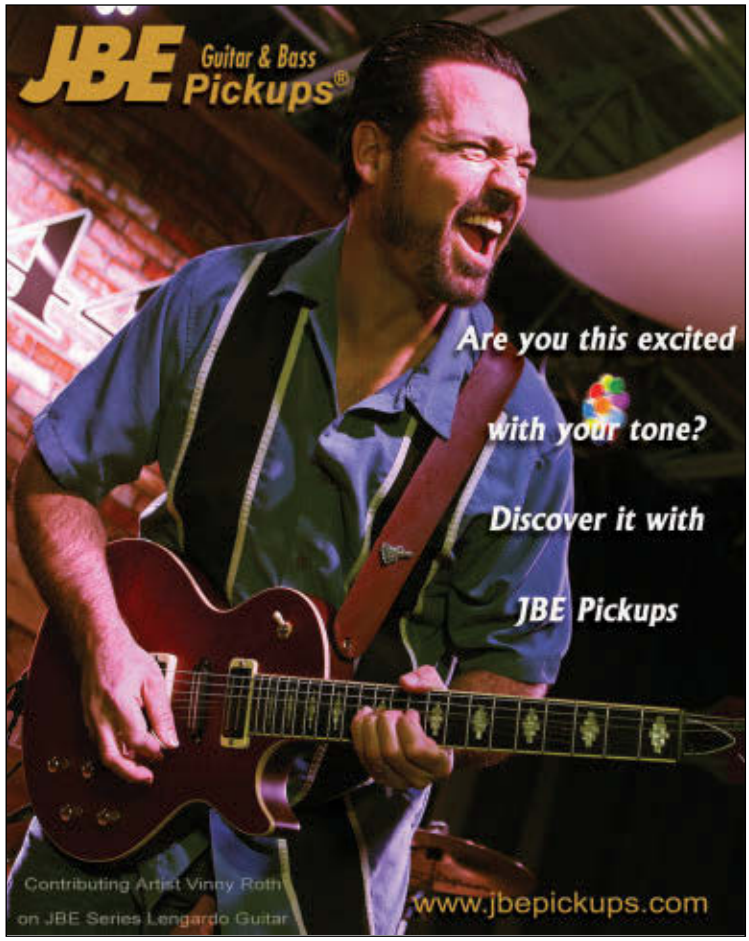
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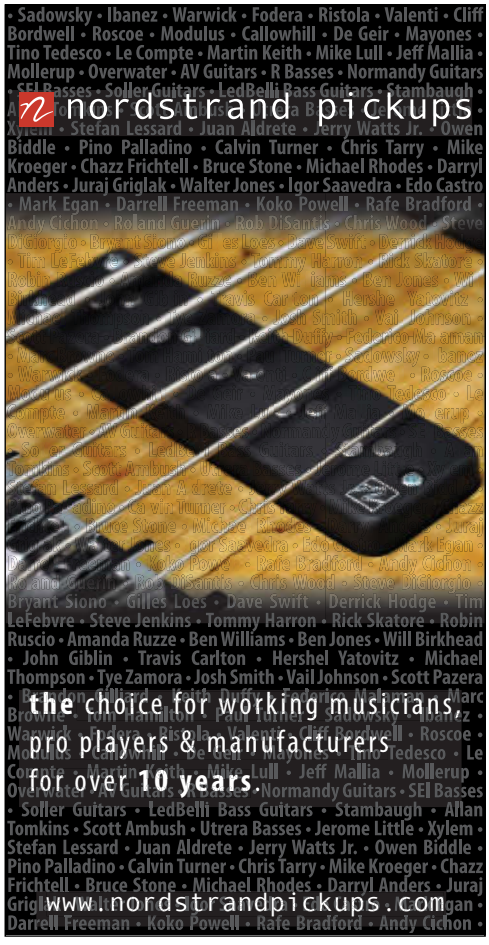
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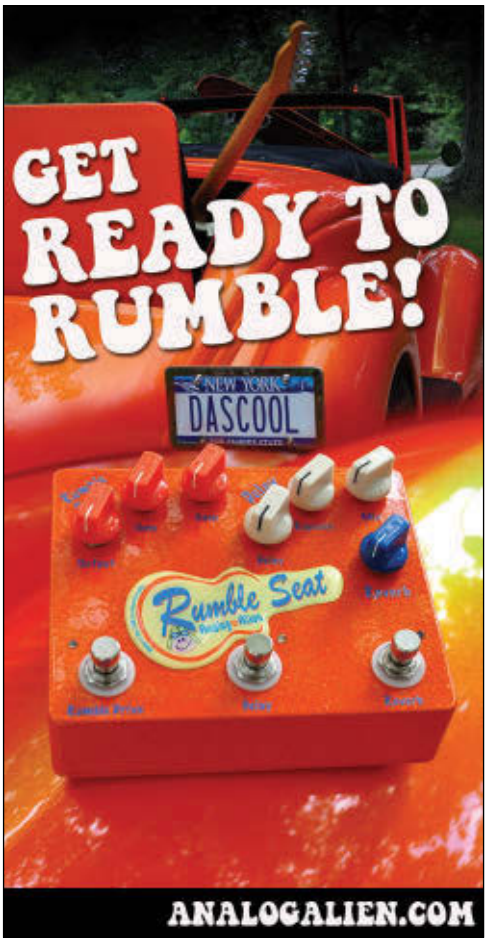
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The Sounds and Scents of 6-String Poetry

BY JOL DANTZIG

I've made quite a few friends in this lifetime. Some are wealthy, some are famous, but most are neither. One thing they usually have in common, however, is a love of music and art in general, and few would cite making money as their driving ambition. Another thing this group has in common is that they like to ask me about guitars—which can be a dangerous.

Make no mistake: I love almost everything about guitars and the gear universe that swirls around them. The way they sound, the way they look, and even the way they smell—all of it. I've often quoted Leo Kottke who famously said (I'm paraphrasing here), "Guitars even sound good when they're dropped on the floor." Going Kottke one better, I'd offer that a guitar can sound wonderful sawing across a microphone stand while tethered to a pair of 100-watt Marshall stacks at full chat. I even like the sound Pete Townshend's SG made bouncing off Abbie Hoffman's head at Woodstock.

Since my introduction to the electric guitar at the impressionable age of 10, all I've ever wanted to do is be around guitars and the music they make. A musical force that was big enough to fill a school gymnasium yet small enough to hold in one's hands stole my young heart and never gave it back. The sheer power and majesty of a few simple chords echoing around a room never ceases to make any day better. So without more prologue, allow me to share a few of the small details that I love so much. Maybe you'll nod in agreement.

Case Study

Let's start with the sound of case latches flipping open. After having carried an instrument into a performance space or hefted it up onto a store counter, the percussive signature of case hardware being manipulated is a welcome sound that every guitarist knows. When a fellow musician wants to share their prized possession, this ritual rhythm is the intro count-off that all guitarists recognize. And then comes the reveal: The first glimpse of a new instrument as the case is opened or gigbag unzipped. A slightly musky aroma of lacquer and hide glue might waft into the air. It teases us and whets our appetite.

Nearby, an amplifier usually stands at the ready. Having been wheeled in and slipped quickly out of its cover, it begs you to flip its switches and make it warm. With a satisfying click, the ruby red jewel light winks its hello, conveying the good to go. Tube amps in particular make me happy—they exude a special scent when the output tubes reach operating temperature, and I never tire of their fiery glow.

The Road to Nirvana

The buzz-click of a live cable being plugged into a guitar is the signal that things are about to get serious. It's glorious foreplay to the wash and wave of sound about to break on the silent beach. Even the hum and static trickle of RF noise is part of the glory of playing electric. Inventors and tinkerers have chased the silent dream of completely bucking the hum, but I actually find it somewhat romantic. It's as if the guitar is a lightning rod for the unseen ether of the universe.

Then there are the first few notes and chords that unmask the character of the instrument at hand. Will it be a willing partner, or will it play a little rough? As much as I like the sounds and feeling that draw my hands into the habitual routines of muscle memory with a sensation like comfort food, I welcome those times when the combination of guitar, amp, and room sweep me away with uncharted notes and phrases. It's not always the easy road that leads to nirvana.

The Naked Truth

When a guitar's sound is strident and pure—hiding nothing and exposing everything—*that's* when it can become really interesting. I enjoy the game of backing down the guitar's volume control to the point where the clean sound dares me to make a mistake, vowing not to catch me if I fall. This is Robert Cray territory—the bigger the risk, the greater the reward. When the notes fly naked from the speakers, there is nothing to hide behind.

The love of this threshold—balanced on a sonic knife edge—has often kept me up long after a conventional bedtime, turning seconds into centuries as I watch myself from somewhere outside my own body. We've all felt it while playing with others, when everything lines up and the music just flows. It doesn't matter if it's a flurry of scales and arpeggios or just a funky two-chord shuffle. When it's good, it's great, and when you lose yourself in the rhythm and sound, it's truly sublime.

Sometimes, when I'm in the zone, reaching for and touching that satisfaction, I feel a special bond with my guitar. I glance down at the side of the neck and view with pride the wear from my own hand that made the instrument mine. The dings and dents are testament to our travels and the time we've spent well together. *This* is when I feel most like myself, and I appreciate the wealth of happiness that music and the guitar bring to life.

So please don't ask me about guitars unless you have a lot of time to kill. My best friends understand that I'd rather be playing mine anyway.

JOL DANTZIG *is a noted designer, builder, and player who co-founded Hamer Guitars, one of the first boutique guitar brands, in 1973. Today, as the director of Dantzig Guitar Design, he continues to help define the art of custom guitar. To learn more, visit guitardesigner.com.*

BEST OF THE CLASSICS

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Built to the same "Special Tube Request" specs of leading amplifier manufacturers of the 1960s, the 6L6GC STR is a rugged and reliable power tube for use in the most demanding guitar amplifier circuits.

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One of the most renowned tubes in guitar amp history. Easily handles the significant plate voltages of today's modern amps while faithfully recreating the classic British sound. Discover why tone connoisseurs regard Mullard as The Master Valve.

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EL84 • GZ34 • KT88

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Money for Nothing

BY JOHN BOHLINGER

Old cars and old guitars: Ain't life grand when you're a picker?

I'm not a businessman. Even in a sticky-floored, warmish PBR-in-a-can dump of a club, negotiating my pay makes me so uncomfortable that I tend to stare at my shoes while sheepishly mumbling "thank you" as I take whatever they hand me after the gig. Luckily, many of the musicians I work with do not share my lack of testicular fortitude when it comes to discussing money. Here's one: Kenneth Smith, a great drummer and my longtime partner-in-crime, was hired by a well-funded starlet to play a showcase for a few labels in Nashville. The conversation went like this:

Kenneth: *The band will need $500 each to cover a rehearsal and the showcase.*

Manager: *That seems exorbitant. You're only playing seven songs. It's just a 30-minute set. That's literally $1,000 per hour. We won't pay that.*

Kenneth: *You're not paying us for those 30 minutes. You're paying us for the 20 years it took to play this well. There are plenty of musicians who will do it for less. Hire them and take your chances.*

The manager grudgingly paid, the starlet was happy, and all was well with the world.

In the music biz, that's negotiating like a Donald *Trump*-level baller. I don't have that skill. Here's what undermines my ability to become a hard-ass negotiator: I recognize the sheer joy of making music is its own reward. That's what drove all of us to spend countless hours alone in our rooms learning to play guitar. That being the case, at times it's difficult to wrap my head around the concept that there is inherent value in doing what most of us would happily do for free. As a teenager, if I was home, I was in my bedroom either playing guitar, sleeping, or doing that thing of which we do not speak that teenage boys do when not sleeping or playing guitar. The idea that I could turn any of these activities into money was a too-good-to-be-true scenario. To this day, each time somebody pays me to play music, I secretly think, "What a sucker—fooled 'em again." Professional musician equals best scam ever.

Playing guitar is a valuable skill because only the soulless are not drawn to the sound. Pull out a guitar anywhere and eventually people will stop, listen, and watch. Get good at it and somebody will pay to listen, or pay you to record something, or pay you to teach *them* how to play. It's not a stretch to monetize this specialized skill. That said, if you're a professional musician, you owe it to yourself and fellow musicians to maintain this perceived value. Here are a few rules to keep in mind.

Recognize what's work and what's just for fun. Free work usually leads to more free work. I've spent many hours toiling over charts, learning songs, and then playing shows for people who did not pay me. This made me feel good if I was having fun and helping good people who need help. Conversely, this made me feel bad when I was helping people who were ultimately only in it for themselves and could have paid me.

People who take advantage of you will continue to if you let them. If an unscrupulous club owner or ego-driven aspiring artist underpays or stiffs you, don't work with them again unless you're comfortable being their chump.

Don't take a gig unless it fulfills at least one of five requirements. It must either be fun, lucrative, good for your career, a favor for a friend, or support a cause you feel strongly about. The best gigs meet several of these requirements. If a gig doesn't fit one of them, it's not worth it.

If you have a bit of talent, work hard, actively seek out employment opportunities in the field, and treat people well, you can make a decent living as a musician. But if you're primarily motivated by money, music is a terrible career choice. It makes professional gambling seem like a reasonable way to pay the bills. I spent all of my 20s and most of my 30s living *way* below the poverty line, but I didn't miss anything. Living like this takes a certain mindset that's increasingly rare in our consumer-driven world. If you prefer to collect experiences rather than things, being a professional musician might be right for you.

Don't get me wrong, I love money and would happily sleep on a bed of freshly printed $100 bills every night if I could, but given the choice between doing something fun and interesting or something very profitable, I've always chosen fun. Which also means I've always chosen to live humbly. (I drive a 1996 Mercury Grand Marquis with four power windows that don't work and one window gaff-taped in place.) As long as I can cover my modest bills and continue to play music, I'm happy. The currency that music pays you goes way beyond money. Playing guitar not only feeds something in you, it can make you friends, brings some beauty and happiness into a dark world, and might even make you appear more attractive to potential sex partners who would ordinarily be out of your league.

To earn money while pursuing one's passion remains the universal dream. But more importantly, just to *have* a passion makes you lucky, even if the passion costs you money rather than earns it. You wouldn't be reading this if you weren't passionate about music, so go ahead and feel a bit smug. Instead of living those "lives of quiet desperation" that Thoreau wrote of in *Walden*, we're making some serious noise—often driven by 50 or more ear-shattering, tube-powered watts.

JOHN BOHLINGER *is a Nashville musician who has led the band on NBC's* Nashville Star *and served as musical director of the* CMT Music Awards *for the last six years. In addition to his "Last Call" column, John recently joined* PG *as our full-time gear demo/Rig Rundown video dude.*

Premier Guitar ISSN 1945-077x (print) and ISSN 1945-0788 (online) is published monthly by Gearhead Communications, LLC. Principal office: 3 Research Center, Marion, IA 52302. Periodicals postage paid at Marion, IA 52302 and at Additional Mailing Offices. *© 2015 Gearhead Communications, LLC. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is prohibited. Premier Guitar are registered trademarks of Gearhead Communications, LLC.* ***Subscribers:*** *If the Postal Service alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address. U.S. Subscriptions: $24.95 for one year. Call for Canada, Mexico and foreign subscription rates.* ***Postmaster:*** *Send address changes to Premier Guitar, 3 Research Center, Marion, IA 52302. Customer Service and subscriptions please call 877-704-4327 or email lois@premierguitar.com. Printed in USA. Volume 20 Issue 7 July 2015*

A TAYLOR FOR EVERYONE

Whether you're looking for a vintage Taylor 815 or a new GS Mini, you'll always find it on Reverb.com. You could even be the lucky winner of a brand new Taylor 612CE 12-Fret *(pictured)*.

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INTRODUCING THE CRY BABY MINI.

cry baby MINI | Dunlop

PREMIER Guitar

PRESENTS

ACOUSTIC

GEAR SHOWCASE

To complement the acoustic-themed content in this issue of PG, *we've included this special promotional section that puts the spotlight on acoustic products. You'll see a parade of new gear from a variety of manufacturers including guitars, amps, accessories and parts. Learn about these new products with detailed specs and convenient links to video and audio demos along with information on where you can go to play and/or purchase the gear!*

GIBSON
L-00 Standard

The legendary Gibson small body with a full J-45 sound. Developed in the 30's, the L-00 was for years an industry standard. The 2016 L-00 Standard captures the heritage of those exemplary early models. So perfectly balanced that the L-00 has unparalleled projection not found in comparable small body guitars. Spec'd just like the iconic J-45 this small body guitar features mother-of-pearl Gibson headstock logo, black Graph Tech Tusq nut, and nickel mini Grover tuners. Upgraded with LR Baggs Element VTC pickup system with Volume, Tone, and Compression.

Street price: **$3,008**
gibson.com

Gibson® Acoustic

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ASPRI
Clip-On Reverb

The Aspri Clip-On series is the only product line on the market that allows full, natural reverb to project directly out of the sound hole of your acoustic guitar.

The Aspri easily clips on and off in a matter of seconds, and requires no mods or batteries.

Nothing compares to the warmth and richness of natural reverberation. Try it yourself... Get inspired!

The Aspri comes in two models: the Acero for Steel-String Guitars, and the Clásico for Nylon-String Guitars.

Street price: $89.95
aspri.com

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C. F. MARTIN & CO., INC.

SP Lifespan Strings

Martin SP Lifespan strings are the next level in studio performance. Treated for long life, they repel dirt, grit and other environmental elements that can quickly alter the sound of your strings. The treatment is so incredibly thin, you won't even know it's there. SP Lifespans are designed to last longer and sound better so you can play on!

Street price: $15.50
martinstrings.com

C.F. Martin & Co. EST. 1833

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000RSGT

The 000RSGT is an affordable 14-fret "000" Road Series guitar with a polished gloss Sitka spruce top. Featuring sapele back and sides and a solid sipo neck, the 000RSGT emulates the appearance, integrity and tone of the Martin Style 18 Auditorium model. Comes equipped with Fishman Sonitone electronics with USB. The USB port allows for easy plug and play with today's computer based recording packages.

Street price: **$1,299**
martinguitar.com

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C. F. MARTIN & CO., INC.

DRSGT

The DRSGT is an affordable 14-fret Dreadnought Road Series guitar with a polished gloss Sitka spruce top. Featuring sapele back and sides and a solid sipo neck, the DRSGT emulates the appearance, integrity and tone of the Martin Style 18 Dreadnought. Comes equipped with Fishman sonitone electronics with USB. The USB port allows for easy plug and play with today's computer based recording packages.

Street price: **$1,299**
martinguitar.com

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GUILD GUITARS

M-140

With its comfortable body and distinctive voice, the M-140 provides excellent balance and a delicate tone. Built with a solid Sitka spruce top and solid African mahogany back/sides, the M-140's 24 ¾" scale length and 1 ¾" nut width on a vintage shaped Guild neck make this concert-size guitar easy to play. The M-140 features an Indian rosewood fingerboard and bridge, NuBone nut and saddle, mother-of-pearl rosette, and tortoiseshell pickguard. Includes Guild's lightweight polyfoam case.

Street price: $749.99
guildguitars.com

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GUILD GUITARS

F-1512

The F-1512 combines two of Guild's most iconic specialties: twelve-string and jumbo guitars. With their large, rounded bodies, jumbo acoustics have been Guild's forte since 1954; combining this shape with the 12-string construction results in an impressively voiced acoustic instrument. Features include: solid Sitka spruce top, solid Indian rosewood back/sides, Indian Rosewood fingerboard and bridge, NuBone nut and saddle, mother-of-pearl rosette, vintage-shaped Guild neck, tortoiseshell pickguard, and Guild's lightweight polyfoam case.

Street price: $999.99
guildguitars.com

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MATON GUITARS

M80c

The Maton M-Series features Sapele tops, backs and sides. Sapele is an tonewood (sometimes known as African Mahogany) which has become popular as a substitute for the now endangered Honduran Mahogany. The two woods are nearly identical tonally and aesthetically. The neck is Fijian Mahogany, the bridge and fingerboard are Indian Rosewood.

These guitars are inspired by classic roots music. Simple pinstripe rosette and inner bindings combine with a black outer binding to produce an understated classy finish. No frills but elegant, just like the music that inspired them. A bone nut and saddle provide the finishing touches for a brilliant vintage tone.

Under the hood the M series share the recent developments of Maton's acoustic range. Scalloped bracing has resulted in a guitar with a rich, full tone, very Maton but with plenty of that brightness and compression associated with the best all Mahogany guitars.

Retail price: $2,172 USD
maton.com.au

Maton MADE IN AUSTRALIA

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FISHMAN
Platinum Pro EQ and Platinum Stage

Our new Platinum Pro EQ and Platinum Stage universal preamps are designed for players looking for a pro-quality preamp/DI for their acoustic guitar, bass, or other acoustic instruments. Classic Fishman tone centers combine with a switchable EQ mode providing more musical control over bass or any other instruments. Critical performance features include adjustable volume boost and XLR D.I. housed in a design that is both beautiful and ergonomic. Platinum Pro EQ features a chromatic tuner, analog soft-knee compressor and effect loop. Platinum Stage is perfect for mobile instrumentalists with an integrated belt-clip and can be powered via 48V phantom power.

Street price: $249.95 (Platinum Pro EQ), and $119.95 (Platinum Stage)
fishman.com/platinum

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GRACE HARBOR ACOUSTIC GUITARS

GHGC-200 Grand Concert

The GHGC-200 Grand Concert shape is slightly smaller (less than ½" in body length and width) then the dreadnought and may be more comfortable for some players. It is often preferred to the larger dreadnought shape for fingerpickers versus strummers. Grace Harbor guitars use extra durable 3.1 mm thick high grade spruce. It has superior tone and features an abalone rosette around the sound hole. It is a beautiful instrument.

Street price: $519
graceharborguitars.com

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EASTMAN MUSIC COMPANY

MD805PGE-BLU

If you're looking for a traditional sound with a not so traditional look the MD805PGE-BLU from Eastman Guitars and Mandolins might be for you. The solid Adirondack top really gives this mandolin outstanding volume and tone. Standard features include: highly flamed solid hand-carved maple back/sides, ebony fretboard/bridge, bone nut, and a Schertler Resocoil pickup with a custom pick guard and discreet hidden volume thumb wheel. Go to your local Eastman dealer and check one out.

Retail price: $1,550
eastmanguitars.com

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PRS GUITARS

Private Stock Built to Order

Private Stock's Built to Order program is your opportunity to create the guitar of your dreams. Whether it's a one-of-a-kind instrument of your own specification, a reproduction PRS instrument from a bygone era, or a personalized version of a model already offered, your Built to Order Private Stock instrument will represent the most personally crafted, customized work available from PRS.

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prsguitars.com

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PRS GUITARS

Private Stock Angelus Cutaway

Select European spruce top, Cocobolo back & sides, paua top purfling, curly maple binding on top & back, 25 ¼" scale length, Peruvian mahogany 'wide' neck, ebony fretboard and headstock veneer w/ paua purfling, ebony bridge, mother of pearl/Paua "old-school" bird inlays & headstock eagle, curly maple/paua rosette, PRS tuning pegs, PRS double action truss rod, Ameritage hardshell case.

Street price: $8,229
prsguitars.com

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PRS GUITARS

SE Alex Lifeson Thinline

15 ½" cutaway body, hybrid X bracing, solid spruce top, dao back and sides, rosewood fretboard & bridge, mahogany neck, PRS adjustable truss rod, "birds in flight" inlays, bone nut & saddle, sound hole mounted volume & tone controls with undersaddle pickup, hardshell case

Street price: $799
prsgutiars.com

PRS PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS®

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PRS GUITARS

SE A10E

15 ½" cutaway body, hybrid X bracing, solid mahogany top, mahogany back and sides, rosewood fretboard & bridge, mahogany neck, PRS adjustable truss rod, bird inlays, bone nut & saddle, sound hole mounted volume & tone controls with undersaddle pickup, hardshell case.

Street price: $599
prsguitars.com

PRS PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS®

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STRING SAVER

String Saver Acoustic Saddles

Install a String Saver saddle and kiss off the string-bustin' blues! String Savers are guaranteed to dramatically reduce string breakage while providing full bodied tone and a significant boost in sustain.

String vibration causes metal fatigue on the string resulting in string breakage. String Saver saddles by Graph Tech Guitar Labs, are impregnated with PTFE, a permanent lubricant which allows the strings to move at the saddle, taking the stress off the one fixed breaking point. Stop replacing good strings, upgrade your guitar to String Saver saddles.

Street price: $13.65
graphtech.com

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TUSQ

Bridge Pins

Upgrade to TUSQ bridge Pins and master your guitars' performance, from Graph Tech Guitar Labs, TUSQ bridge pins are precision engineered under high pressure and heat to transfer the maximum amount of vibration directly to the top of your guitar. They are consistent from piece to piece to offer you the rich tonal characteristics of the finest genuine bone or ivory - without the problems caused by variations in grain.

Street price: $27.95
graphtech.com

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BREEDLOVE
Premier Concert Cedar LTD

Reliable, versatile and accessible, these road-ready guitars have earned a reputation among performing musicians as go-to instruments. Joining this heralded lineup is the Premier Concert Cedar LTD, which combines the comfort and playability of our Concert body shape with a Western red cedar top, known for its diverse harmonic abilities and articulation.

The Premier Concert Cedar LTD is truly a player's instrument with a wider nut width and slim neck profile that's a favorite among fingerstylists. Exemplifying the best qualities of Breedlove's Distinctively Crafted Sound, solid Western red cedar was chosen for the top and solid East Indian rosewood for the back and sides—a tonewood combination that rewards a player's touch with sweet, extended harmonic content and a robust bottom end. Professionals and enthusiasts alike will appreciate the delicate interaction it provides with your individual style of expression.

Street price: $2,799
breedlovemusic.com

Breedlove
Distinctively Crafted Sound

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BEDELL GUITARS
Blackbird Vegan Parlor

Bedell Blackbird Vegan Parlor guitar is the ultimate forest stewardship guitar in addition to its vegan friendly construction. Inspired by the beauty and wonder of the American landscape: the streams and deserts, swamps and forests, beaches and valleys, and all the magnificent animals that grace this vast and diverse country, from shore to shore.

The Bedell Blackbird Vegan models aren't just sustainable, they're also built using only American harvested woods: a salvaged Sitka spruce soundboard, Western bigleaf maple back and sides, an Eastern hard rock maple neck, and a walnut fretboard, bridge and peghead overlay. Bedell craftsmen have achieved unparalleled tone and projection from these plentiful American woods for a truly planet-friendly guitar made from ethically harvested trees. The guitar features a translucent black burst and is available in dreadnought, orchestra and parlor body shapes. All models include a workshop-installed K&K Pure Mini pickup and a Bedell deluxe hardshell case.

Street price: $2,490
bedellguitars.com

Bedell™ GUITARS

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WEBER FINE ACOUSTIC INSTRUMENTS

Diamondback F Mandolin

You may recognize the Diamondback F mandolin. We'll let you in on a little secret: The Diamondback is essentially our ever-popular Yellowstone with a few can't-live-without upgrades. The Diamondback mandolin offers all the tradition and power of the Yellowstone mandolin with a double-cutaway fingerboard, a red spruce top, ivory binding, gold hardware, our fern inlay, and a gorgeous pre-distressed satin finish.

Street price: $5,999
webermandolins.com

WEBER

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SHUBB CAPOS

C1N guitar capo

This new generation Shubb steel string capo is dressed up in an attractive brushed nickel finish. As with all the new Shubb models, corners are rounded and contoured and comes with Shubb's patented roller closing mechanism.
For over forty years the name of Shubb has been synonymous with intelligent design and quality manufacturing. With millions of capos sold, the Shubb Capo is the first choice..often the ONLY choice of discerning musicians worldwide.

Street price: $20.95
shubb.com

SHUBB CAPOS

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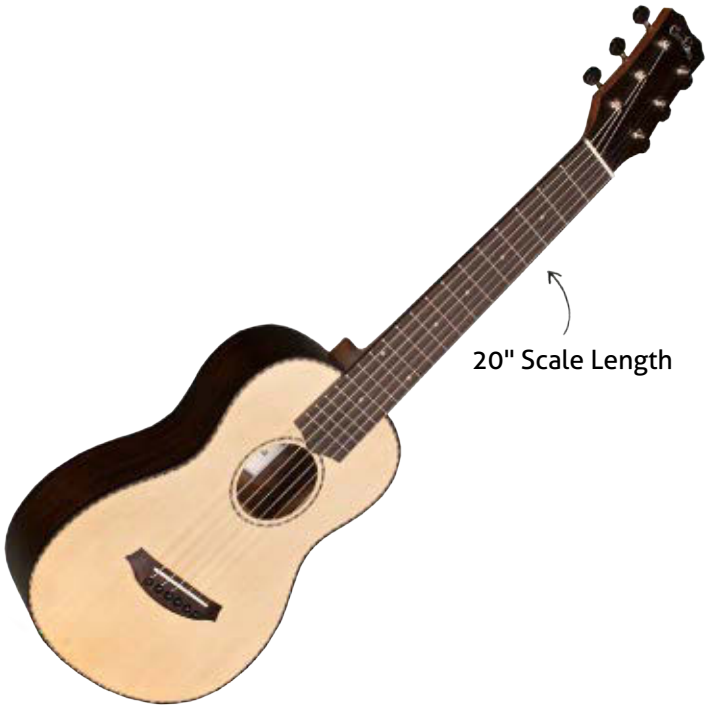
CORDOBA GUITARS

Mini R

The Cordoba Mini R is the ultimate travel instrument, offering the playability of a full-size nylon-string guitar in a compact, lightweight body with an impressively loud voice. This miniature guitar features: solid spruce top, rosewood back/sides, and a comfortable, thin U-shaped neck. The 2" nut width offers the feel and string spacing of a full-size guitar. This is a perfect companion for road trips, vacations, and hanging out at home. Includes a Cordoba gig bag.

Street price: $249.99
cordobaguitars.com



Cordoba

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CORDOBA GUITARS

GK Pro Maple

The GK Pro Maple is the ultimate gigging instrument for the serious musician. Built with a solid European spruce top and solid flamed maple back/sides, this model offers a bright, snappy tone. The GK Pro Maple's neck is designed to have little or no relief, offering low action for comfort and quick playability. Other premium features: Fishman PreFix ProBlend pickup, two-way truss rod, ebony fingerboard, rosewood bridge, and high-gloss finish. Includes humidified hardshell case.

Street price: $1,679.99
cordobaguitars.com

Cordoba

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SKB CASES

3i-4719-20 Jumbo Acoustic Watertight Case

The 3i-4719-20 iSeries Waterproof Jumbo case is the choice of all professional musicians that have to fly with their gear.

Molded of ultra-high-strength polypropylene copolymer resin the case is water/dust proof with a gasketed lid, inline wheels, Patented TSA Trigger Latches, and 3 molded handles. The platinum plush lined EPS interior fits Jumbo Acoustic Guitars with a lower bout up to 17 ¼" wide and features large pockets for storing important accessories for the gig.

Street price: $349.99
skbcases.com

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KYSER

Quick-Change Capo

A Kyser Quick-Change is expertly engineered and built to last. It is reliable and does just what it is designed to do — clearly raise the pitch of the guitar so you can play in a different key without retuning or changing fingering - all with only one hand. Kyser pioneered this design and although often imitated, a Kyser® is never equaled. There is no substitute for a Kyser® Quick-Change®. 100% made in USA.

Street price: $24.95
kysermusical.com/store/acoustic-guitars

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WASHBURN GUITARS
WD10SCE

WD10SCE features class leading tone, materials and cosmetics. High grade solid Sitka spruce is used for the soundboard and scalloped-bracing, paired with mahogany back and sides; in conjunction with a genuine bone nut and saddle, the Heritage 10 Series produces a rich and focused voice. In the Heritage 10 Series, the player also enjoys class leading cosmetics such as an ABS ivory fully bound body, inlaid wood rosette, and pearl Washburn logo.

When it comes time to step onto the stage and plug in, the WD10SCE rewards the player with natural acoustic tone from its Fishman 301T electronics. The 301T provides simple tone shaping with bass and treble tone controls and a feedback reducing phase switch and a built in tuner provides quick and accurate tuning.

Street price: $299
washburn.com

Washburn GUITARS
A CHICAGO ORIGINAL SINCE 1883

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WASHBURN GUITARS
WP11SNS

The WP11SNS is based on designs Washburn used over 100 years ago. It features mahogany back and sides for a slightly more focused, articulate tone and has pearl dot fingerboard inlays. It has a 24.75" scale and features a natural stain finish, solid cedar top supported by quarter sawn scalloped sitka spruce bracing, abalone rosette and standard Washburn rosewood bridge. The mahogany neck features a rosewood fingerboard with 44mm nut and gold open gear tuners. These specs produce a nicely balanced tone perfect for fingerpicking and singer/song writers. The clarity of the parlor sized body is especially suited to recording and mic'd performance.

Street price: **$299**
washburn.com

Washburn GUITARS
A CHICAGO ORIGINAL SINCE 1883

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COMPOSITE ACOUSTICS®

Composite Acoustics® GX Guitar

The Composite Acoustics GX is our most popular and versatile model. The grand auditorium-sized cutaway provides full bass response with easy access to upper frets with its no-heel neck joint. The GX is braced with our performance tuned lightweight carbon fiber bracing for extremely well-balanced volume on every note. The GX provides a very quick and clean response - excellent for chord strumming and flat picking. The comfortable double-cut sculpted back will make you think this guitar was made just for you!

Composite Acoustics is committed to designing and building the best sounding, most innovative acoustic guitars on the planet. We give you excellent playability that won't change and worry-free performance wherever you go. Cutting-edge design meets precision craftsmanship for a sound, feel and look that exceeds the highest expectations. From indoors to outdoors, super humid to bone dry, Composite Acoustics guitars are ready when you are, wherever you are.

Street price: $2899.99
caguitars.com

COMPOSITE ACOUSTICS®

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When we introduced our Aged Tone guitar series a few years ago, the acoustic world was quick to take note the virtues of torrefied top wood. Now we're taking torrefaction a step further with our new Fully Torrefied Aged Tone Dreadnought. We've brought the process to the full guitar – back, sides, neck, braces and bridge plate. The result is a guitar that is one step closer to the sound and look of vintage instruments.

Retail price: **$7,045.00**
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Bourgeois Guitars

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D'ANGELICO GUITARS

EX-63

D'Angelico is proud to bring you the EX-63, a gorgeous throwback capable of rousing an awful lot of attention. A non-cutaway archtop modeled after the last guitar that John D'Angelico ever built, the EX-63 boasts remarkable playability and comfort, featuring an ebony fingerboard and C-shape neck. Elegance and function come together in our floating ebony Electro-Core bridge and D'Angelico's signature trapeze-style stairstep tailpiece.

Street price: $1,499.99
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D'ANGELICO GUITARS

Gramercy (SG-200)

With a spruce top and rosewood back and sides, the Gramercy offers vivid depth. Finger-picking produces soft warmth, while hard strumming busts the sound open without sacrificing clarity. The Gramercy comes equipped with the Fishman INK-4 onboard preamp and pickup system, complete with its sleek built-in tuner. A truly dynamic instrument in its playability, the Gramercy can serve the mellow finger-style player, the frenetic rocker, and any player in between.

Street price: $999.99
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D'ANGELICO GUITARS

Brooklyn (SD-400)

The Brooklyn (SD-400) has a voice all its own. Its rich, dreadnought shout is propelled by a sapele back, sides, and a solid Sitka spruce top. The Brooklyn's mahogany neck is capped with a rosewood fingerboard where block mother-of-pearl inlays add the class of a fresh pair of wingtips. Brass bridge pins help the Brooklyn sing by providing maximum resonance. It's amp-ready with the Fishman INK-4 onboard preamp and pickup system, complete with built-in tuner.

Street price: $899.99
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D'ANGELICO GUITARS

Lexington (SD-300)

A booming non-cutaway dreadnought, the Lexington (SD-300) offers a powerful low-end so resonant that playing lush, full chords may very well become addictive. A solid Sitka spruce top meets a sapele back and sides to create the Lexington's subtle elegance, complemented by a tortoise pickguard. The slim, mahogany neck makes for wonderful playability. Though capable of great projection, the Lexington's high-end is uncompromised by its rich low-end, producing a consistently balanced sound.

Street price: $899.99
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D'ANGELICO GUITARS

Madison (SJ-600)

Don't let its size fool you into thinking it's one dimensional: the Madison can play a quiet corner with hushed plucks or fill a hall with giant jangling. Flame maple back and sides meet a maple neck and Sitka spruce top to give the Madison its unique warmth. Like the rest of the D'Angelico acoustic family, the Madison features gold Grover Super Rotomatic tuners and the Fishman INK-4 onboard preamp, pick-up system and built-in tuner.

Street price: **$899.99**
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D'ANGELICO GUITARS

Mercer (SG-100)

The Mercer Grand Auditorium (SG-100) boasts the duo of a slim, mahogany neck and a rosewood fingerboard with block mother-of-pearl inlays, creating subtle elegance and supreme playability. Sapele back and sides work in tandem with a solid Sitka spruce top to give the Mercer its bright clarity. Prepared to project, the Mercer comes with the Fishman INK-4 onboard preamp, pickup system and built-in tuner.

Street price: **$899.00**
dangelicoguitars.com

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D'ANGELICO GUITARS

Bowery (SD-500)

A single-cutaway dreadnought with a solid Sitka spruce top, its rosewood back and sides project the Bowery's massive roar. But have no fear: a slim C-shaped neck and rosewood fingerboard make for great comfort. With the sleek additions of FU-Tone brass bridge pins, a tortoise pickguard and block mother-of-pearl inlays, the Bowery emerges as a classic, and the premier instrument in D'Angelico's new acoustic series.

Street price: $999.00
dangelicoguitars.com

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D'ANGELICO GUITARS

Mott (SBG-700)

Robust in sound and stature, the Mott features a solid Sitka spruce top with flame maple back and sides. Never cumbersome, its rosewood fingerboard and slim, maple neck come together to create maximum comfort. Though able to stand its ground when kept acoustic, the Mott shines when amplified. The Mott comes equipped with the Fishman INK-4 onboard preamp, pickup system, and built-in tuner, dead accurate even for the lowest lows.

Street price: $899.00
dangelicoguitars.com

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McPherson 4.0 Flamed Maple back & sides with maple leaf inlay, Engelmann top, cocobolo head cap & fretboard, Koa binding, Gold EVO frets, Nickel waverly tuning machines, African Mahogany neck, Engelmann/Rosewood/Engelmann brace kit.

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RADIAL ENGINEERING

PZ-PRE Acoustic Instrument Preamp

The Radial PZ-Pre... a high-performance acoustic instrument preamp designed to take you from club to concert and everywhere in between.

It features two input channels with 100% Class-A piezo boosters for the most natural tone you have ever heard! On-board feedback control is managed with a dual-Q notch filter and phase reverse, plus a low-cut filter to eliminate runaway resonance. Two Hi-Z outputs drive your on-stage amp and tuner while two balanced DI outs feed in-ear monitors and the front-of-house mixer. There's even a mute switch for tuning and a power booster for soloing.

Best of all, the PZ-Pre is designed to work with all acoustic instruments that have any type of pickup including violin, banjo, cello, ukulele, lute, mandolin, dulcimer, autoharp, sitar, stand-up bass and every kind of guitar.

The easy PZ-Pre...

Great acoustic sound made easy!

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Radial engineering

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BENSON AMPS

Benson
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bensonamps.com

The Monarch is a uniquely versatile amp able to go from British bark to American warmth, and can be tailored to your taste with custom component choices. The Monarch features point-to-point wiring, dovetailed pine cabinets, and is made by hand in Portland OR.

Benson amps
HAND MADE IN PORTLAND, OREGON

VFE PEDALS

Pale Horse Dynamic Overdrive
Street: $199
vfepedals.com

The Pale Horse started as a personal quest to improve the most widely used overdrive circuit. Chasing down the answers led to a unique design that addresses all the criticisms of that classic green stompbox. The Pale Horse is so smooth, transparent, and dynamic, you might even find yourself using it instead of your own amp's distortion. Like all VFE Pedals, you can customize the color, graphic, knobs, and more through the Pedal Wizard!

VFE

BEARFOOT FX

Honey Bee
Street: $199
bearfootfx.com

The Honey Bee continues to be a touchstone of tone ... originated small amp emulation over ten years ago anc continues to be the truest feeling and sounding of the 'small, warm and worn' sonic homages.

The Honey Beest took this sound up a few notches b adding a sculpted preamp into a slightly reformulated Honey Bee that was more suited to higher gain and volume usage.

The Honey Bee and the Uber and Beest cover a wide range of applications for the often imitated, legendary Bee sound.

BearFoot Guitar Effects

ROCK SOLID GUITAR STANDS

The Elite Six

Street: $299

(262) 320-7747

rocksolidguitarstands.com

Introducing The Elite 6 from Rock Solid Guitar Stands Made of solid mahogany, this is our most "Rock Solid" guitar stand yet! With its beautifully rounded edges and solid construction, The Elite 6 can truly be labeled as furniture-grade Like any of our previous models, this guitar rack can be the perfect compliment to your home or studio, putting your favorite axes on display – you might find yourself playing a bit more as well!

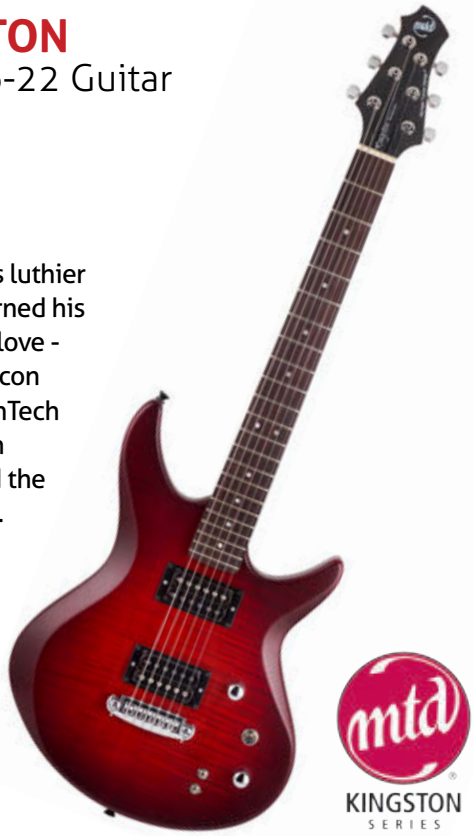
MTD KINGSTON

MTD Rubicon 6-22 Guitar

Street: $799

(800) 741-0109

mtdkingston.com



World Renowned bass luthier Michael Tobias has turned his talents to his original love - guitars. The MTD Rubicon 6-22 is a 22 fret GraphTech Resomax hardtail with incredible sustain and the well known MTD tone. Available with maple or rosewood fingerboard. Trans Red gloss finish or Dr. Browns Burst (cherry cola) satin finish. Also available in 24 fret tremolo.

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D'Angelico New York

At D'Angelico Guitars, we are committed to honoring our history by forging our future. Today, we offer the same legendary archtop guitars that original owner John D'Angelico built in New York City throughout the thirties and forties, while also producing innovative instruments for modern masters. We strive to create the world's finest instruments for the world's finest musicians.

Now offering a full line of versatile models, D'Angelico caters to players of all styles – ranging from the jazz traditionalist to the experimental rocker. Classic reissues pay homage to John D'Angelico, known for his archtop mastery, while newer models continue to hit the market and prove themselves in no time. We remain committed to excellence in sound, playability and innovation.

In 2015, the D'Angelico family is still growing strong. For the first time, we have launched an acoustic line comprised of six stunning models, ranging in size from grand auditorium to jumbo. Each model offers the quality expected from the D'Angelico name while remaining impressively affordable.

As D'Angelico grows, our mission remains the same: to produce masterfully-crafted guitars that John D'Angelico would be proud to call his own.

D'Angelico
NEW YORK
Excel

EXL-1

Classic magic revitalized. Our homage to master-builder John D'Angelico's original archtop design, the EXL-1 is a legendary instrument. Its floating pickup design produces vibrant resonance, easily handling both rich, smoky comp chords and intricate lead lines. The EXL-1 exudes elegance, with a laminated spruce top, maple back, and signature stairstep tailpiece, pickguard and tuners. Capturing the spirit of its mid-century counterpart, it is unmatched in quality, playability and style, all offered at an attractive price. The EXL-1 humbly accepts the title given to it by so many jazz players: their "dream guitar."

EX-59

Classic archtop with a bite. Originally designed by master-luthier John D'Angelico in 1959, the EX-59 is a classic archtop but equipped with P-90 pickups, ideal for the player who wants to exercise some attitude. Its 17-inch body and signature D'Angelico headstock come together to create excellent balance and playability. An exact replica of the original EX-59, this reissue keeps the '59 flair, accentuated by the absence of a pickguard and complete with retro-vibe volume and tone knobs. Buttery but unafraid to bite, the EX-59 has been adopted by blues icon Robert Randolph as his guitar of choice.

EX-DH

Electric archtop mastery. Offered as an alternative to our 17-inch models, the brand new EX-DH embodies D'Angelico's legendary archtop craftsmanship while providing extra comfort with its smaller body. It promises flawless clarity and tonal balance. Want to control a room? Go to the neck pickup and dig in. Dual Kent Armstrong humbuckers provide power and smoothness, allowing the EX-DH to create a bed of sound for itself. Boasting all of D'Angelico's signature features, the EX-DH's exceptional sound is complemented by a stairstep tailpiece and pickguard, Grover Super Rotomatic tuners and mother-of-pearl fingerboard inlays.playability and style, all offered at an attractive price. The EXL-1 humbly accepts the title given to it by so many jazz players: their "dream guitar."

EX-DC

Our take on the now. The EX-DC is D'Angelico's response to the rising popularity of the double-cutaway semi-hollow electric guitar. Powered by dual Kent Armstrong humbuckers, the EX-DC was designed with versatility in mind, offering a marriage of enveloping fullness and vivid high-end that never gets tinny. Its heavier body is balanced wonderfully by the signature D'Angelico headstock, while its standard neck shape and medium jumbo frets make for great comfort. Never short on style, the EX-DC is also available with a gold stairstep tailpiece and comes in a variety of colors, including a striking seafoam green.

NY-DC

New American beauty. Made right here in the USA, the NY-DC is a double-cutaway semi-hollow powered by a pair of Seymour Duncan pickups for maximum tonal versatility. A center maple block creates near infinite sustain and provides a warm, robust tone. Don't be afraid to let the NY-DC open up; its sound is both engulfing and pristinely clear. Distinguishing features bring the beauty: a maple neck is capped with a ebony fingerboard, leading to a headstock marked with a mother-of-pearl "New York" inlay. These features are paired with a one-piece, flame maple top and back along with a trapeze-style stairstep tailpiece, completing the NY-DC's masterful look.

EX-175

Resuscitation not included. Just breathe. You're not seeing things. The EX-175 is the only D'Angelico archtop equipped with a Bigsby vibrato. With a strong, crisp low-end and a fiercely cranky high-end, the EX-175 is made for players seeking the new rock edge D'Angelico provides. The Bigsby allows for anything from glassy shimmers to warped dizzy-spells, while the roller bridge guarantees stable tuning. Dare to be dynamic: the EX-175 is resilient to feedback and can be pushed harder than most archtops while still maintaining clarity. Its ultra-slim taper neck makes for supreme comfort, whether you're blazing through gained-up note-heavy licks or carefully articulating fingerpicked lines.

EX-SS

Never underestimate a lightweight. The EX-SS packs a lot of punch in its 15-inch body, the smallest of all the D'Angelico archtops. Truly a versatile instrument, the EX-SS boasts a rich, full-bodied low-end when on the neck pickup, and a powerful mid-range on the bridge pickup. High-output Kent Armstrong humbuckers deliver crisp attack and balanced resonance, making the EX-SS perfect for live settings. The signature D'Angelico stairstep trapeze-style tailpiece offers style and purpose, providing comfortable string tension for bluesy bends. The EX-SS shines when kept clean or boosted with overdrive, ideal for R&B, jazz, rock, and all the nameless places in between.

EX-SD

Make room for a new solidbody in your collection. The EX-SD boasts classic D'Angelico beauty while offering ultra-thick rock tones. Powered by dual Kent Armstrong humbuckers, the EX-SD proves D'Angelico is long past its jazz-only days. Throw some overdrive on and the bridge pickup position offers endless sustain, while the neck pickup provides a searing high end. Kept clean, the EX-SD sounds glossy and full. Its single cutaway and slim-taper neck are built for solos, while medium jumbo frets make for dead accurate bends. The EX-SD is everything you'd expect from a high-quality solidbody and more.

EX-SD BASS

Big, fat powerhouse. Brand new for 2015, we are proud to introduce the EX-SD Bass, D'Angelico's solidbody 4-string beast. Featuring a chambered body, the EX-SD Bass boasts impressive sustain and functionality, even when you crank the volume. Perfectly balanced Kent Armstrong pickups make for exceptional tonal variety: the neck pickup position provides jazzy warmth while the bridge position offers rock brightness. The EX-SD Bass is also a wonderfully comfortable instrument, weight-relieved by its chambered body and featuring a ¾" scale neck. Versatile, powerful and comfortable, the EX-SD has arrived.

EX-BASS

Heavy groove, light weight. Designed by D'Angelico President Steve Pisani and head luthier Dave Wise, the EX-Bass is our first-ever electric archtop bass. Available fretted or fretless, the single-cutaway hollow-body design makes the EX-Bass exceptionally light, while its standard neck shape and Indian rosewood fingerboard provide ultimate comfort. Truly versatile in tone, the EX-Bass boasts a traditional wiring design with volume, tone and a three-way pickup selector switch. The neck position offers the warmth of a vintage '60s hollow-body bass while the bridge position is powerful, bright and loud for when you need more punch.

THE MOTT (SBG-700)

No family is complete without a bassman. The Mott Bass (SBG-700) is where style, tradition and innovation meet. Robust in sound and stature, the Mott features a solid Sitka spruce top with flame maple back and sides. Never cumbersome, its rosewood fingerboard and slim, maple neck come together to create maximum comfort. Though able to stand its ground when kept acoustic, the Mott shines when amplified. As with its acoustic D'Angelico siblings, the Mott comes equipped with the Fishman INK-4 onboard preamp, pickup system, and built-in tuner, dead accurate even for the lowest lows.

EX-63

You'll catch them staring. D'Angelico is proud to bring you the EX-63, a gorgeous throwback capable of rousing an awful lot of attention. A non-cutaway archtop modeled after the last guitar that John D'Angelico ever built, the EX-63 boasts remarkable playability and comfort, featuring an ebony fingerboard and C-shape neck. Elegance and function come together in our floating ebony Electro-Core bridge and D'Angelico's signature trapeze-style stairstep tailpiece. Complete with Grover Super Rotomatic tuners and our signature Scalini pickguard, the EX-63 has the tendency to outshine.

THE LEXINGTON (SD-300)

Never underestimate a lightweight. The EX-SS packs a lot of punch in its 15-inch body, the smallest of all the D'Angelico archtops. Truly a versatile instrument, the EX-SS boasts a rich, full-bodied low-end when on the neck pickup, and a powerful mid-range on the bridge pickup. High-output Kent Armstrong humbuckers deliver crisp attack and balanced resonance, making the EX-SS perfect for live settings. The signature D'Angelico stairstep trapeze-style tailpiece offers style and purpose, providing comfortable string tension for bluesy bends. The EX-SS shines when kept

THE BROOKLYN (SD-400)

No, it will not bum you a smoke. The brand new Brooklyn (SD-400) has a voice all its own. Its rich, dreadnought shout is propelled by a sapele back, sides, and a solid Sitka spruce top. The Brooklyn's mahogany neck is capped with a rosewood fingerboard where block mother-of-pearl inlays add the class of a fresh pair of wingtips. Brass bridge pins help the Brooklyn sing by providing maximum resonance. Along with the rest of the D'Angelico acoustic family, the Brooklyn is amp-ready with the Fishman INK-4 onboard preamp and pickup system, complete with built-in tuner.

THE BOWERY (SD-500)

Both a beauty and a beast. From master-luthier John D'Angelico's humble beginnings in the lower east side of Manhattan, we bring you our flagship acoustic, the Bowery (SD-500). A single-cutaway dreadnought with a solid Sitka spruce top, its rosewood back and sides project the Bowery's massive roar. But have no fear: a slim C-shaped neck and rosewood fingerboard make for great comfort. With the sleek additions of FU-Tone brass bridge pins, a tortoise pickguard and block mother-of-pearl inlays, the Bowery emerges as a classic, and the premier instrument in D'Angelico's new acoustic series.

THE MERCER (SG-100)

The Gramercy's younger brother has tricks of his own. The Mercer Grand Auditorium (SG-100) boasts the duo of a slim, mahogany neck and a rosewood fingerboard with block mother-of-pearl inlays, creating subtle elegance and supreme playability. Sapele back and sides work in tandem with a solid Sitka spruce top to give the Mercer its bright clarity. Prepared to project, the Mercer comes with the Fishman INK-4 onboard preamp, pickup system and built-in tuner. Offered at an attractive price, the Mercer will prove itself steadfast to any player.

THE GRAMERCY (SG-200)

Crystal clear tone powered by rosewood. May we introduce the Gramercy Grand Auditorium (SG-200), brand new for 2015. With a spruce top and rosewood back and sides, the Gramercy offers vivid depth. Finger-picking produces soft warmth, while hard strumming busts the sound open without sacrificing clarity. The Gramercy's slim, C-shape neck brings comfort and balance. As with all D'Angelico acoustic instruments, the Gramercy comes equipped with the Fishman INK-4 onboard preamp and pickup system, complete with its sleek built-in tuner. A truly dynamic instrument in its playability, the Gramercy can serve the mellow finger-style player, the frenetic rocker, and any player in between.

THE MADISON (SJ-600)

The elephant in the room never sounded so good. Meet D'Angelico's jumbo, the Madison (SJ-600). Don't let its size fool you into thinking it's one dimensional: the Madison can play a quiet corner with hushed plucks or fill a hall with giant jangling. Flame maple back and sides meet a maple neck and Sitka spruce top to give the Madison its unique warmth. Like the rest of the D'Angelico acoustic family, the Madison features gold Grover Super Rotomatic tuners and the Fishman INK-4 onboard preamp, pick-up system and built-in tuner. The Madison is ready to be your big friendly giant.

WWW.DANGELICOGUITARS.COM

1942 USA MASTERBUILDER

Fresh out of the time machine. The limited edition D'Angelico USA 1942 Excel is the first reissue in the USA Master Builder series. Dedicated to the most accurate reproduction possible, we put an original 1942 Excel through both MRI and X-Ray scans, precisely measuring every spec. True to D'Angelico's resplendent archtop tone, the 1942 Master Builder Excel offers silky chords and a rich low-end that never gets muddy. A non-cutaway 18" body made from AAA European maple and spruce provides remarkable warmth. Featuring a Johnny Smith Lollar pickup, pickguard-mounted tone and volume knobs, and a stairstep tailpiece, the 1942 Master Builder Excel exudes elegance.

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